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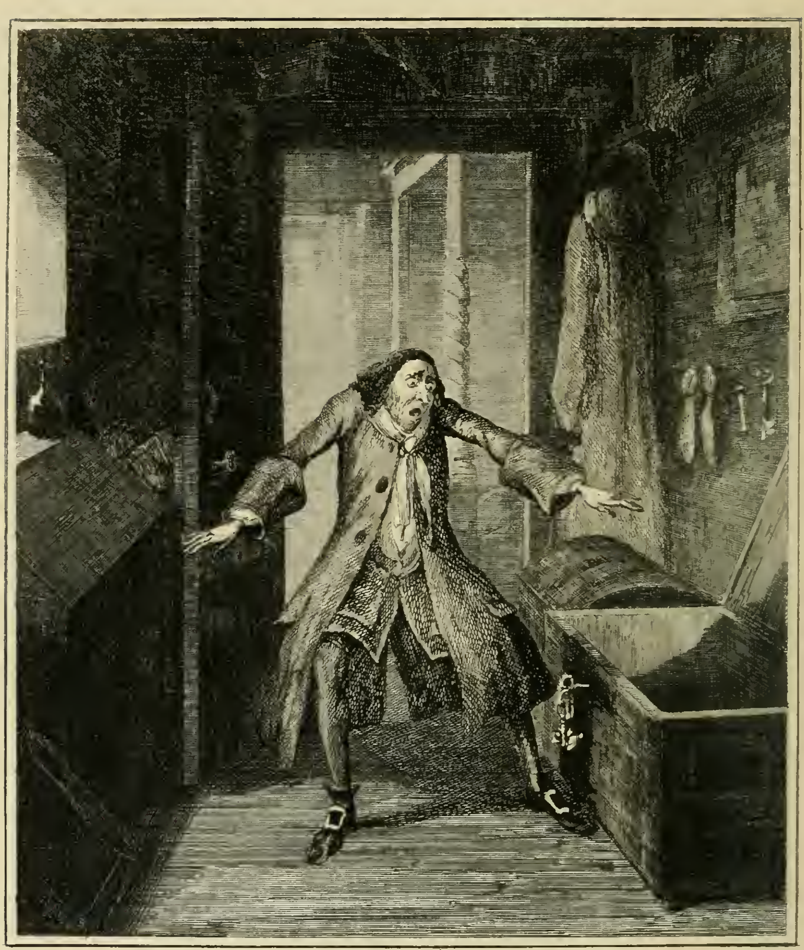
THE

MISER'S DAUGHTER



George Cruikshank

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THE

MISER'S DAUGHTER

BY

WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH

AUTHOR OF "THE TOWER OF LONDON," "OLD SAINT PAUL'S," ETC.

"The delineation of such characters as these I consider as very moral instruction to mankind, and a lesson more demonstrative of the perfect vanity of unused wealth, than has lately been presented to the public."—TOPHAM'S *Life of Elwes.*

With Illustrations by George Cruikshank

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TO

MY THREE DEAR DAUGHTERS,

FANNY, EMILY-MARY, AND BLANCHE.

I offer this Tale.

W. H. A

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THE MISER'S DAUGHTER.

BOOK THE FIRST.

RANDULPH CREW.

CHAPTER I.

THE MISER'S DWELLING IN THE LITTLE SANCTUARY—OPPOSITE NEIGHBOURS—PETER POKERICH AND THE FAIR THOMASINE—JACOB POST—RANDULPH CREW.

In a large, crazy, old-fashioned house at the corner of the Little Sanctuary in Westminster, and facing the abbey, dwelt, in the year 1744, a person named Scarve. From his extraordinary penurious habits, he received the appellation of *Starve*, and was generally denominated by his neighbours "Miser Starve." Few, if any, of those who thus designated him, knew much about him, none of them being allowed to cross his threshold; but there was an air, even externally, about his dwelling, strongly indicative of his parsimonious character. Most of the windows in the upper stories, which, as is usual with habitations of that date, far overhung the lower, were boarded up; and those not thus closed were so covered with dust and dirt that it was impossible to discern any object through them. Many parts of the building were in a ruinous condition, and, where the dilapidations were not dangerous, were left in that state; but wherever some repairs were absolutely necessary to keep the structure together, they were made in the readiest and cheapest manner. The porch alone preserved its original character. It projected far beyond the door-way, and was ornamented with the arms of a former occupant of the habitation, carved in bold relief in oak, and supported by two mermaids sculptured in the same wood. All the lower windows were strongly grated, and darkened like the upper with long-accumulated dust. The door was kept constantly bolted and barred, even in the day-time; and the whole building had a dingy, dismal, and dungeon-like aspect.

Mr. Scarve's opposite neighbour, who was as curious as opposite neighbours generally are, and who was a mercer named Deacle, used to spend hours with his wife and daughter, who were as curious as himself, in reconnoitering the miser's dwelling. But their curiosity was rarely, if ever, gratified, except that they occasionally saw some member of the family go forth, or return. Another constant spy upon the mysterious abode was Peter Pokerich, a young barber and perruquier, occupying the next house to the mercer, but whose motives were not, like the other's, entirely those of curiosity. Having completed his apprenticeship about a twelvemonth before, Peter Pokerich had at that time settled in the Little Sanctuary, and had already obtained a fair share of business, being much employed in dressing the wigs of the lawyers frequenting Westminster Hall. He was a smart, dapper little fellow, with no contemptible opinion of himself, either as to mental or personal qualifications, and being determined to push his fortune with the sex, had, in the first instance, paid very marked attentions to the mercer's daughter, Thomasine, or, as she was styled by her admirers, "the Fair Thomasine;" and these attentions, it was pretty evident, were not altogether unacceptable. Just, however, as he was on the eve of declaring himself, and soliciting the hand of the fair Thomasine, with little apprehension of a refusal, he accidentally beheld the miser's daughter, Hilda Scarve, and his inflammable heart taking fire at her beauty, which was indeed sufficiently ravishing to captivate a colder breast than his, he thenceforth became her slave, and could no longer endure the auburn locks, the hazel orbs, the pretty features, and plump little person, of the fair Thomasine, which had once appeared so attractive in his eyes. Another consideration was not without its weight in turning the scale of his affections. Hilda's father was reputed to be of immense wealth; she was his only child, at least so it was generally understood, and would, of course, inherit the whole of his vast hoards; and as, furthermore, he was an old man, it could not, in the course of nature, be very long before the property must come to her. This consideration decided Peter in favour of the miser's daughter. and it was the hope of obtaining a glimpse of her that made him play the spy upon her father's dwelling.

The repairs previously alluded to were made by the miser's servant, Jacob Post, who, on this occasion, stepped over the way to borrow a ladder from Mr. Deacle. For reasons of his own the mercer readily complied with the request, and when Jacob's work was done, and he brought back the ladder, he was invited by its owner to his back-parlour, where Mrs. Deacle and the fair Thomasine were seated, and where a substantial repast was laid out. Jacob was requested to sit down, and with some hesitation complied. A plate, loaded with cold beef, was next offered him, and he cleared it in an inconceivably short space of time. The plate was again filled, and again emptied, and as his appetite seemed in no ways stayed, and the edge-bone was nearly bared, a large remnant of a potato-pie in a brown earthenware dish was substituted. To the astonishment of the party, he soon disposed of it. These viands requiring to be washed down, Mr. Deacle took a jug of ale, which stood at one corner of the table, and pouring out a large foaming glass, offered it to his guest, winking as he did so at his wife, as much as to say, "We have him now." Whether or not Jacob saw the wink is of little import; he took the glass, drained it to the last drop, and sprang to his feet.

"Why, you're not going?" cried Mr. Deacle.

"Yes, I am," replied Jacob, in his deep, gruff voice.

"Well—but stop a bit, I've something to say to you," rejoined Mr. Deacle.

"Master 'll wonder what I'm doing here so long," returned Jacob. "He watched me cross over with the ladder."

"You should have thought of that before you sat down," remarked Mrs. Deacle, somewhat spitefully. "If you would draw another jug of ale, my love, I dare say Mr. Jacob would risk incurring his master's displeasure, and stay a few minutes longer."

"No, I wouldn't," replied Jacob, looking at the same time wistfully at the jug. "No, I wouldn't," he added, slightly softening his tone.

"Try him," whispered Mrs. Deacle to her spouse.

Mr. Deacle took the hint, and likewise took up the jug, and winking at his wife, proceeded to a side door, opening upon a flight of stone steps, evidently leading to the lower part of the premises, and disappeared. With true feminine tact, Mrs. Deacle had perceived Jacob's weak point. He seemed spell-bound. The temptation of the "other jug" was irresistible. He scratched his forehead with the point of his greatthumb-nail, pushed up the little brown scratch wig covering the top of his head still higher, glanced at the door, but did not attempt to withdraw. The figure he now cut was so ridiculous that both ladies burst into screams of laughter. Not in the slightest degree disconcerted, Jacob maintained his position, and eyed them with a look so stern that their merriment speedily died off in a quaver. The Formidable certainly predominated over the Ridiculous in Jacob's appearance. He was six feet two in height, with a large-boned frame, not encumbered with too much flesh, and immense hands and feet. Though slightly in-kneed, he held himself as erect as an old soldier. He had a grim black muzzle, a wide mouth garnished with keen white teeth, the masticatory powers of which he had just so satisfactorily exhibited, thick and jetty eyebrows, and an enormous nose slightly tinged towards its extremity with a mulberry hue. He wore an old grey cloth coat, of the formal cut in vogue about twenty years before, with a row of plate buttons extending from the collar to the skirts, as well as others on the pockets, and which, though it only reached to his knees, must have dangled down to its original owner's ankles.

His waistcoat was of the same material as the upper garment, and evidently dated back to the same remote period. A dirty neckcloth, looking positively white from its contrast with his swarthy chin, was twisted round his throat. He possessed great personal strength, and, indeed, was reported to have driven off, single-handed, three housebreakers, who had contrived one night to effect an entrance into his master's habitation. It was thought that the miser retained him as much for self-defence as for his other services; and it was even said that in some money-lending transactions in which Mr. Scarve had been engaged with suspicious characters, Jacob stood by on guard.

By this time, the mercer had returned with a jug, whose frothing head made Jacob's mouth water. Seeing the effect produced on him, Mr. Deacle indulged in a sly chuckle.

"Ah, Jacob," he said, feigning a commiserating tone, "I fear you don't get such liquor as this with your master. He don't brew over strong—not too much malt and hops, eh?"

"That's true enough, sir," replied Jacob, gruffly.

"Do you get any ale at all, Jacob?" inquired Mrs. Deacle.

"No," replied Jacob, in a tone so abrupt that it made the good dame start, and elicited a slight scream from the fair Thomasine.

"'Odd's precious!" exclaimed Mrs. Deacle, "how the fellow does frighten one. And so you have no ale?"—(Jacob shook his head)—"nor small beer?"—(another negative)—"then what *do* you drink, for wine or spirits must be out of the question?"

"Treacle-beer," rejoined Jacob; "and little enough of that."

"So I should think," remarked Mr. Deacle, cunningly. "Come, come, friend Jacob!—this may be very well for your master, but it won't do with me. Your nose would never keep its goodly colour on such thin potations."

A grim smile crossed Jacob's face, and he tapped the feature in question.

"I understand," replied the mercer, winking; "private cellar, ah! Perfectly right, Jacob. Private larder, too, I'll be sworn. You couldn't live on Miser Starve's—I mean, Mr. Scarve's—allowance. Impossible, Jacob—impossible! Take a glass, Jacob. Your master must be very rich, eh?"

"I don't know," replied Jacob, after tossing off the glass; "he doesn't live like a rich man."

"There I differ from you, Jacob," returned the mercer; "he lives like a miser, and misers are always rich."

"Maybe," replied Jacob, turning away.

"Stop, stop!" cried the mercer—"you must finish this jug before you go. Are you the only servant in the house?"

"The only *man*-servant," replied Jacob, looking as if he did not relish the question; "but there's sometimes a *cheer*woman, and the two ladies does for themselves."

"Do for themselves!" ejaculated Mrs. Deacle. "How dreadful!"

"Dreadful indeed!" echoed the fair Thomasine, with an expression of ineffable disgust, theatrically fine in its effect.

"Well, I *should* like to see the inside of your master's house, Jacob, I confess," pursued Mrs. Deacle.

"You wouldn't wish to repeat the visit, ma'am, if you had once been there," he answered, drily.

"I hope the miser doesn't ill-treat his daughter," said the fair Thomasine. "Poor thing, how I pity her! Such a sweet creature, and such a tyrant of a father!"

"She's not ill-treated, miss," rejoined Jacob, gruffly; "and she's not so much to be pitied as you suppose; nor is master a tyrant, by no means, miss."

"Don't be offended, Jacob," interposed the mercer, pouring out a glass, and handing it to him. "Women always fancy themselves ill-treated either by their fathers, husbands, or brothers—all except their lovers, eh, Jacob?"

"I'm sure, my love, nobody can say *I* complain," said Mrs. Deacle.

"Nor I, father," added Thomasine; "as to lovers, I know nothing about them, and don't desire to know."

"Bless me! how you take one up," rejoined Mr. Deacle, sharply. "Nobody does say that either of you complains. Surely, Jacob, the old lady whom I always see with your master's daughter can't be her mother?"

"No, she's her aunt," replied Jacob.

"On the father's side?"

"Mother's."

"I thought as much; and her name is ——?"

Jacob looked as though he would have said, "What's that to you?" but he answered, "Mrs. Clinton."

"You'll think me rather curious, Jacob," pursued the mercer, "but I should like to know the name of your master's daughter. What is it, eh?"

"Hilda," replied Jacob.

"Hilda!—dear me—a very singular name," cried Mrs. Deacle.

"Singular, indeed! but sweetly pretty," sighed the fair Thomasine.

"Probably a family name," remarked the mercer. "Well, Miss Hilda's a charming creature, Jacob,—charming."

"She *is* charmin'," repeated Jacob, emphatically.

"Not very well dressed though," muttered the mercer, as if speaking to himself: and then he added aloud—"She'll be a great catch, Jacob,—a great catch. Any engagement—any one in view—any lover, eh?"

"No one," replied Jacob. "Unless," he added, bursting into a horse laugh, "it's your next-door neighbour, Peter Pokerich, the barber."

"Peter Pokerich!" screamed the fair Thomasine, starting to her feet, and assuming an attitude of distraction.

"Mercy on us! what's the matter, Tommy?" cried the mercer, in surprise.

"Don't ask me, father," rejoined the young lady, gasping like a tragic actress, and passing her hand across her brow as if to clear off some imaginary hair,—her own auburn tresses being trimly secured beneath a pretty little fly cap. "Tell me, Jacob," she added, catching his arm, "is my—is Peter—is the faithless one Hilda Scarve's lover?—has he declared his passion?—is he accepted?—tell me all, Jacob, and whatever effort it may cost me, I will bear it."

"I've nothing more to tell than this," replied Jacob, who listened with imperturbable calmness to this passionate and touching address;—"he has lately taken to followin' young missis when she goes out to walk with her aunt."

"But has not dared to address her, Jacob?" cried the fair Thomasine, breathlessly.

"Not till t'other day," replied Jacob, "and then he stopped her just as she was enterin' the house. Luckily, I was there, and I guv' him a taste of my crab-stick, which I'll engage he'll remember."

"Cudgelled!—Peter false, and cudgelled!—cruel, yet kind, Jacob!" cried the fair Thomasine, relaxing her hold, and staggering back. "This is too much—support me, mother!"

"What's the matter with you, Tommy, I say?—are you going distracted?" cried the mercer.

"Fetch the ratafia, my dear, and don't ask questions," replied his wife. "Don't you see there's been a secret attachment?" she added, in an under tone—"that deceitful little barber has played her false. But I'll bring him to his senses, I'll warrant him. Poor thing! this is just the state I was thrown into when I heard of your going to Stourbridge Fair with cousin Sally. The ratafia! the ratafia!—quick! quick!"

The mercer opened a cupboard, took out the cordial, gave it to his wife, and then motioning Jacob to follow him, rushed out of the room so precipitately, that he overset a person who was listening at the door, and who proved to be no other than Peter Pokerich.

"What! you here, sir," cried Mr. Deacle, in astonishment. "Then you've heard what has passed. Go in to my daughter, and make her mind easy directly."

"If he doesn't, I'll give him another taste of the crab-stick," added Jacob.

"But it would be highly indecorous—highly improper, in me to go in just now, Mr. Deacle," remonstrated Peter.

"Not more indecorous, or improper, than listening at the door," rejoined the mercer. "Go in directly, sir."

"Ay, go!" added Jacob, menacingly.

And Peter, seeing opposition in vain, opened the door and sneaked in. A stifled scream and an hysterical laugh succeeded his entrance.

The mercer accompanied Jacob to the street door, and, as he passed through the shop, pointed out the different rich stuffs to him.

"I wish you could induce your young mistress to come and look at my assortment of stuffs," he said; "it is the choicest in town, though I say it, who shouldn't say it. I've garden silks, Italian silks, brocades, tissues, cloth of silver, ditto gold, fine Mantua silks, right Genoa velvets, English ditto, embossed ditto. Or if she wants commoner stuffs, I've fine thread satins, both striped and plain, fine Mohair silks, satinets, burdets, Persianets, Norwich crapes, anterines, silks for hoods and scarfs, hair camlets, sagathees, shalloons, and right Scotch plaids. Can you recollect all these articles?"

"I should need a better memory than I have to recollect half of 'em," replied Jacob.

"I would send her some stuffs to look at, if you think her father wouldn't object," said the mercer: "this black velvet would suit her exactly, or this rich Italian silk."

"It would cost me my place to take them," replied Jacob; "and yet, as you say, they would become her purely. But it's of no use thinkin' of them," he added, walking away.

"One word more, Jacob," said Mr. Deacle, detaining him, and whispering in his ear, "I didn't like to ask the question before the women—but they *do* say your master's a Papist and a Jacobite."

"Who say so?" cried Jacob, loudly and gruffly. "Speak up and tell me!"

"Why, the neighbours," replied the mercer, somewhat abashed

"Then tell 'em from me that it's a lie," rejoined Jacob. And heedless of any further attempts to detain him, he strode away.

One night, about a month after the incident above related, which took place at the latter end of April, 1744, just as Peter Pokerich was in the act of shutting up his shop, he observed a horseman turn out of King-street, and ride towards him. It was sufficiently light to enable him to discover, on a nearer approach, that the stranger was a young man, about one or two and twenty, with a tall, well-proportioned figure, at once vigorous and symmetrical, extremely regular and finely-formed features, glowing with health and manly beauty, and slightly, though not unbecomingly, embrowned by exposure to the sun. Apparently disdaining to follow the fashion of the period, or proud of his own waving brown locks, the young man suffered them to fall in their native luxuriance over his shoulders. The fashion of his dark green riding dress—which, ill made as it appeared in the eyes of the knowing barber, revealed his fine figure to great advantage—as well as his general appearance, proclaimed him from the country. Looking hard at Peter as he advanced, the stranger drew up beside him.

"Can you tell me where Mr. Scarve lives?" he asked.

Peter started, and stared at his interrogator in speechless astonishment. The young man looked surprised in his turn, and repeated the inquiry.

"Miser Starve—beg pardon!—Mr. Scarve? but he's generally known by the former name hereabouts," cried Peter. "Oh yes, sir, I *do* know where Mr. Scarve lives."

"Then, probably, you will have the goodness to direct me to the house," returned the young man. "This is the Little Sanctuary, is it not?"

"Yes, sir! yes!" replied Peter. "But what may be your business with Miser Starve—beg pardon again!—Mr. Scarve?"

"My business is not of much consequence," rejoined the young man, somewhat coldly and haughtily, "but it refers to Mr. Scarve himself."

"Beg pardon, sir—no offence, I hope," returned Peter, in a deprecatory tone; "but Mr. Starve—bless me! how my tongue runs—Mr. Scarve is such a very odd man. He wont see you unless your business is *very* particular. Will you favour me with your name, sir?"

"My name is Randulph Crew," returned the stranger.

"Crew—Crew!" repeated Peter; "that should be a Cheshire name. Excuse the liberty, but are you from that county, sir?"

"I am—I am!" replied the other, impatiently.

"Ah! knew it at once, sir. Can't deceive me," rejoined Peter. "Fine head of hair, sir, very fine; but must lose it. Very well for Cheshire—but won't do in London. Ladies will laugh at you. Nothing so ungenteel as one's own hair. I have a fine head of hair myself, but can't wear it. Must have a peruke. Perukes are as essential to a gentleman now-a-days as lace to his clothes. I've wigs of all sorts, all fashions, all prices: the minor-bob; the Sunday buckle; the bob-major; the apothecary's bush; the physical and chirurgical tie; the scratch, or blood's skull covering; the Jehu's Jemmy, or white-and-all-white; the campaign; and the Ramillies. Step in, and I'll show you the last new periwig—the Villiers—brought in by the great beau of that name—heard of him, I dare say, sir,—and which all our brights, smarts, putts, and jemmies are wearing. I've the counterpart of Beau Villiers's own periwig, which, between ourselves—for it must go no further—I obtained from his gentleman, Mr. Crackenthorpe Cripps. It's quite a wonder. Do step in, sir, and look at it. It'll quite ravish you."

"Thank you, friend, I am content with the covering nature has given my head," replied Randalph.

"And with very good reason, sir," replied Peter; "but fashion, sir,—fashion is arbitrary, and has decreed that no man shall wear his own hair. Therefore, you must, perforce, sir, adopt the periwig."

"Will you show me Mr. Scarve's residence, or must I apply for information elsewhere?" cried the young man, wearied with the barber's loquacity.

"Not so fast, sir,—not so fast," replied Peter. "I must tell you something about the old gentleman first. Do you know him, sir?"

Randulph Crew uttered a hasty negative.

"Then *I do*," pursued Peter. "Terrible miser, sir—terrible! —denies himself all the comforts of existence—makes his family and servants live upon a bare bone for a week—thinks of nothing but his gold—and, as to his daughter—"

"Oh, he has a daughter, has he?" interrupted Randulph. "I was not aware of it. Is she at all like him?"

"Like him!—no!" echoed Peter. "She's beautiful beyond description." But thinking such commendation rather injudicious in the present case, he checked himself as maladroitly as a horse pulled up too suddenly, and added, "At least some people say so; but, for my own part, I can see nothing to admire in her."

"Well, perhaps I may judge for myself," observed Randulph.

"Perhaps you may," quavered Peter. "He's just the man to captivate her," he thought. "I wish I could misdirect him; but most probably Jacob wont admit him."

"And now, friend, will you show me the house!' cried Randulph.

"With pleasure, sir—with pleasure," replied Peter, pointing to the opposite habitation; "there it is, at the corner."

Vexed at having been so long and so unnecessarily detained, Randulph Crew turned his horse's head, and dismounting before the miser's door, knocked loudly against it with the butt-end of his heavy riding-whip. Peter anxiously watched his proceedings; but as no answer was returned to the summons, he began to hope the young man would go away; but in this he was disappointed, for the latter renewed his application, and did not desist till checked by the gruff voice of Jacob Post, who shouted from a little grated window, through which he reconnoitered the intruder, "Halloo! what's the matter?—who's there?"

"Is Mr. Scarve at home?" asked Randulph. "I want to see him."

"Then you can't," rejoined Jacob, in his harshest accents, but which sounded like music in the ears of the attentive Peter.

"But I must and will," rejoined Randulph, in a peremptory tone. "I have a packet to deliver to him—to his own hands—an important packet. Tell him that."

"A Jacobite, I'll be sworn," cried Peter, to himself. "I must watch him narrowly. I should feel gratified in being the means of hanging that young man."

"Well, I'll take your message to my master," growled Jacob, after a short pause. "But I must scruti*nize* you a little before I admit you. You seem to me, as far as I can make out, to have a good deal of the cut of a highwayman about you."

"He, he, he!—good, Jacob—good!" tittered Peter.

Some minutes elapsed before Jacob, who had disappeared, returned. A heavy tread was heard along the passage leading to the door, succeeded by the rattling of a chain, the clanking of bars, and the shooting back of a couple of ponderous bolts. The door was then thrown open, and exhibited the great gaunt figure of Jacob, holding a lantern in one hand, the light of which he threw full upon the face of the young man, while he kept the other hand, which grasped the redoubted crab-stick, out of view. Satisfied, at length, with the investigation, he growled forth, "It'll do. Master'll see you. You may come in."

"That for your trouble, friend," said Randulph, slipping a crown into Jacob's hand, as he tied his horse's bridle to a ring in the door-post.

"I wonder what this is given for?" muttered Jacob, as he pocketed the coin. "It's the only suspicious thing I've noticed about him. I must keep an eye upon him. But I dare say he only wants to see young missis, and she's worth more than twenty crowns to look at."

Thus ruminating, he admitted Randulph into the passage, locked and bolted the door, took the light out of the lantern, and placing it in a copper candlestick, led the way towards a back room.

While the door was being fastened, Peter Pokerich darted across the way, shouting to Randulph, "I'll take care of your horse, sir." No attention, however, being paid to the offer, he hurried back for a light, and began carefully to examine the saddle, peering into the holsters, and trying to open the saddle-bags. to see whether he could obtain any clue to the supposed Jacobite principles of the owner.

CHAPTER II.

THE MISER AND HIS DAUGHTER—RANDULPH DELIVERS THE PACKET TO THE FORMER—ITS RECEPTION.

Following his conductor along the passage, the boards of which being totally destitute of carpet or cloth, sounded hollowly beneath their feet, Randulph Crew glanced at the bare walls, the dusty and cobweb-festooned ceiling, and the staircase, as devoid of covering as the passage, and could not but admit that the account given him by the barber of Mr. Scarve's miserly habits was not exaggerated. Little time, however, was allowed him for reflection. Jacob marched quickly on, and pushing open a door on the right, ushered him into his master's presence.

Mr. Scarve was an old man, and looked much older than he really was—being only sixty-five, whereas he appeared like eighty. His frame was pinched, as if by self-denial, and preternaturally withered and shrivelled; and there was a thin, haggard, and almost hungry look about his face, extremely painful to contemplate. His features were strongly marked, and sharp, and his eye gray, keen, and piercing. He was dressed in a threadbare cloth robe, trimmed with sable, and wore a velvet nightcap, lined with cotton, on his head. The rest of his habiliments were darned and patched in an unseemly manner. Beside him was a small table, on which was laid a ragged and dirty cloth, covered with the remains of his scanty meal, which Randulph's arrival had interrupted. Part of a stale loaf, a slice of cheese, and a little salt constituted the repast.

Everything in the room bespoke the avaricious character of its owner. The panelled walls were without hangings or decoration of any kind. The room itself, it was evident, had known better days and richer garniture. It was plain, but handsome in its character, and boasted a large and well-carved chimney-piece, and a window filled with stained glass, displaying the armorial bearings of the former possessor of the house, though now patched in many places with paper, and stopped up in others with old rags. This window was strongly grated, and the bars were secured in their turn by a large padlock, placed inside the room. Over the chimney-piece were placed a couple of large blue and white china bottles, with dried everlasting flowers stuck in the necks. There were only two chairs in the room and a stool. The best chair was appropriated by the miser himself. It was an old-fashioned affair, with great wooden arms, and a hard leathern back, polished, like a well-blacked shoe, by frequent use. A few coals, carefully piled into a little pyramid, burnt within the bars, as if to show the emptiness of the grate, and diffused a slight gleam, like a mocking laugh, but no sort of heat. Beside it sat Mrs. Clinton, an elderly maiden lady, almost as wintry-looking and pinched as her brother-in-law. This antiquated lady had a long, thin neck, a turned-up nose, and a skin as yellow as parchment; but the expression of her countenance, though rather sharp and frosty, was kindly. She wore a close-fitting gown of dark camlet, with short, tight sleeves, that by no means concealed the angularities of her figure. Her hair, which was still dark as in her youth, was gathered up closely behind, and surmounted by the small muslin cap then in vogue.

The object, however, that chiefly riveted Randulph's attention on his entrance was neither the miser himself nor his sister-in-law—it was his daughter. Her beauty was so extraordinary that it acted like a surprise upon him, occasioning a thrill of delight, mingled with a feeling of embarrassment. Rising as he entered the room, she gracefully, and with much natural dignity, returned his salutation, which, through inadvertence, he addressed almost exclusively to her. Hilda Scarve's age might be guessed at nineteen. She was tall, exquisitely proportioned, with a pale, clear complexion, set off by her rich raven tresses, which, totally unrestrained, showered down in a thick cloud over her shoulders. Her eyes were large and dark, luminous, but steady, and indicated firmness of character. Her look was grave and sedate, and there was great determination in her beautifully-formed but closely-compressed lips. Her aspect and deportment exhibited the most perfect self-command, and whatever effect might be produced upon her by the sudden entrance of the handsome visitor, not a glance was suffered to reveal it, while he, on the contrary, could not repress the admiration excited by her beauty. He was, however, speedily recalled to himself by the miser, who, rapping the table impatiently, exclaimed, in a querulous tone, "Your business, sir?—your business?"

"I have come to deliver this to you, sir," replied Randulph, producing a small packet, and handing it to the miser. "I should tell you, sir," he added, in a voice of emotion, "that it was my father's wish that this packet should be given to you a year after his death—but not before."

"And your father's name," cried the miser, bending eagerly forward, and shading his eyes so as to enable him to see the young man more distinctly, "was—was—"

"The same as my own, Randulph Crew," was the reply.

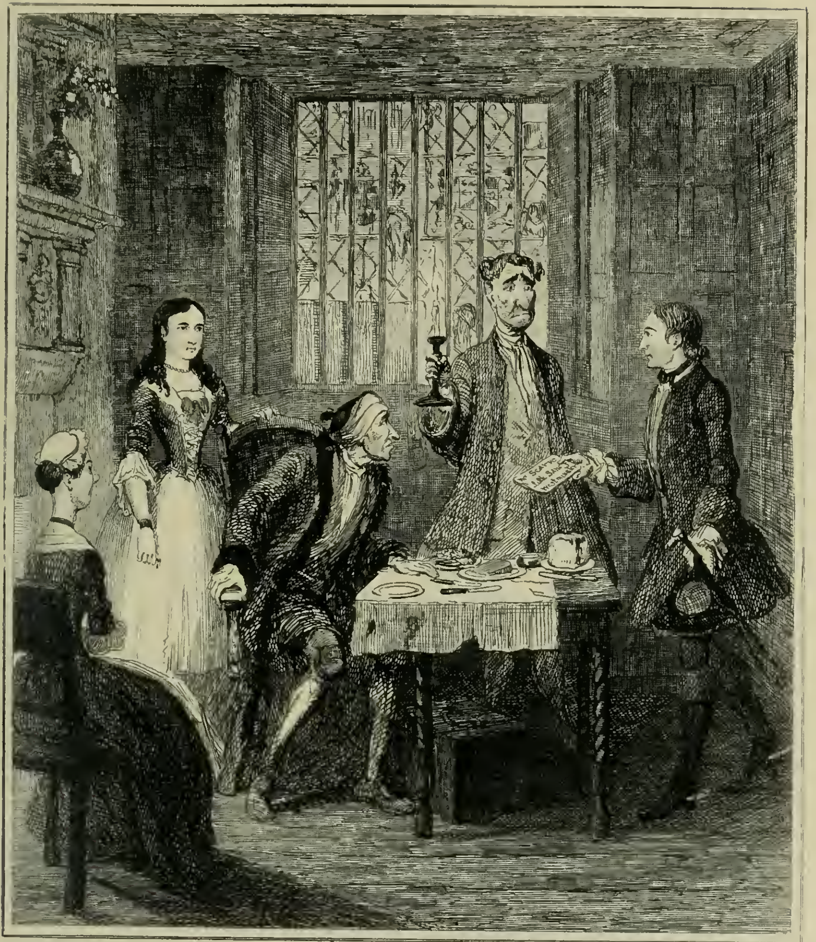
"Gracious heaven!" exclaimed the miser, falling back in his chair, "and is he dead?—my friend—my old friend!" and he pressed his hand to his face, as if to hide his emotion.

Hilda bent anxiously over him, and tried to soothe him, but he pushed her gently away.

"Having discharged my mission, I will now take my leave," said Randulph, after a slight pause, during which he looked on in silent astonishment. "I will call at some other time, Miss Scarve, to speak to your father respecting the packet."

"No, stay!" cried Hilda, hastily. "Some old and secret spring of affection has been touched. I entreat you to wait till he recovers. He will be better presently."

"He is better now," replied the miser, uncovering his face; "the fit is past; but it was sharp while it lasted. Randulph Crew," he added, faintly, and stretching out his thin hand to him, "I am glad to see you. Years ago, I knew your father well. But unhappy circumstances separated us, and since then



George Cruikshank

Pandulph Crew delivering the packet to Mr. Sc[illegible]

I have seen nothing of him. I fancied him alive, and well, and happy, and your sudden announcement of his death gave me a great shock. Your father was a good man, Randulph—a good man, and a kind one."

"He was, indeed, sir," rejoined the young man, in a broken voice, the tears starting to his eyes.

"But somewhat careless in money matters, Randulph—thoughtless and extravagant," pursued the miser. "Nay, I mean nothing disrespectful to his memory," he added, seeing the young man's colour heighten. "His faults were those of an over-generous nature. He was no man's enemy but his own. He once had a fine property, but I fear he dissipated it."

"At all events, he greatly embarrassed it, sir," replied Randulph; "and I lament to say that the situation of his affairs preyed upon his spirits, and no doubt hastened his end."

"I feared it would be so," said the miser, shaking his head. "But the estates were entailed. They are yours now, and unembarrassed."

"They might have been so, sir," replied the young man; "but I have foregone the advantage I could have taken of my father's creditors, and have placed the estates in their hands, and for their benefit."

"You don't mean to say you have been guilty of such incredible folly, for I can call it nothing else!" cried the miser, in a sharp and angry tone, and starting to his feet. "What! give the estates to the very men who ruined your father! Have you been rash and unadvised enough to break down the barriers the law had built around you for your protection, and let in the enemy into the very heart of the citadel? It is the height of folly—of madness!"

"Folly or not, sir," returned the young man, haughtily, "I do not repent the step I have taken. My first consideration was to preserve the memory of my father unblemished."

"Unblemished!—pshaw!" cried the miser. "You would have cleared the spots from your father's name much more effectually if you had kept fast hold of the estates, instead of reducing yourself to the condition of a beggar."

"Father!" exclaimed Hilda, uneasily—"father, you speak too strongly—much too strongly."

"I am no beggar, sir," replied Randulph, with difficulty repressing his anger, "nor will I allow such a term to be applied to me by you or any man. Farewell, sir." And he would have left the room, if he had not been detained by the imploring looks of Hilda.

"Well, then, you are reduced to the condition of a poor man, if you prefer the term—though I think it synonymous with that of beggar—and therefore must be a dependent one," said the miser, who seemed utterly reckless of the pain he was inflicting

"But for your own folly, you might now be worth three thousand a-year—ay, three thousand a-year!—for I knew your father's rental. Why, you are more thoughtless, more improvident than him who went before you. You have sold your birthright for less than a mess of pottage. You have sold it for a phantom, a shade, a word—and those who have bought it laugh at you, deride you. Out upon such folly! Three thousand a-year gone to feed those birds of prey—those vultures—that ravened upon your father's vitals while living, and now riot upon his offspring—it's monstrous, intolerable! Oh! if I had left my affairs in such a condition, and my daughter were to act thus, I should not rest in my grave!"

"And yet, in such a case, I should act precisely as this gentleman has acted, father," rejoined Hilda.

"You speak like one ignorant of the world, and of the value of money, Hilda," cried the miser, turning to her. "Heaven be praised! you will never be in such a situation. I sha'n't leave you much—not much—but what I *do* leave will be unembarrassed. It will be your own, too; no husband shall have the power to touch a farthing of it."

"Have a care, father," rejoined Hilda, "and do not clog your bequest with too strict conditions. If I marry, what I have shall be my husband's."

"Hilda," cried the miser, shaking with passion, "if I thought you in earnest, I would disinherit you!"

"No more of this, dear father," she rejoined, calmly; "I have no thought of marrying, and it is needless to discuss the point till it arises. Recollect, also, there is a stranger present."

"True," replied the miser, recovering himself. "This is not the time to talk over the subject, but I wont have my intentions misunderstood. And now," he added, sinking into the chair, and looking at Randulph, "let me inquire after your mother? I remember her well as Sophia Beechcroft, and a charming creature she was. You resemble her more than your father. Nay, restrain your blushes, I don't mean to flatter you. That which is a beauty in a woman is a defect in man; and your fair skin and long hair would become your sister, if you have one, better than yourself."

"Really, sir," rejoined Randulph, again reddening, "you make strangely free with me."

"I made free with your father before you, young man," rejoined the miser; "and it was for telling him a piece of my mind that I lost his friendship. More's the pity!—more's the pity! I would have served him if he would have let me. But to return to your mother. You acted unjustly to her, as well as to yourself, in not retaining the family estates."

"My mother has her own private property to live on," replied Randulph, who winced under the stinging observations of the miser.

"And what's that?" rejoined Mr. Scarve; "a beggarly—I crave your pardon—a pitiful hundred a-year or so. Not that a hundred a-year *is* pitiful, but it must be so to her, with her notions and habits."

"There you are mistaken, sir," replied Randulph; "my mother is entirely reconciled to her situation, and lives accordingly."

"I am glad to hear it," replied the miser, in a sceptical tone; "I own I did not give her credit for so much self-governance, but I hope it is so."

"Hope, sir!" cried Randulph, angrily; "is my word doubted?"

"Not in the least," rejoined the miser, drily: "but young people are apt to take things on trust. And, now, as you have fooled away your fortune, may I ask what you are about to do to retrieve it? What profession—or, rather, what trade do you propose to follow?"

"I shall follow neither trade nor profession, Mr. Scarve," replied Randulph. "My means, though small, enable me to live as a gentleman."

"Hum!" cried the miser. "I suppose, however, you would not object to some employment. An idle man is always an expensive man. But what brought you to London?"

"My chief motive was to deliver that packet to you," replied Randulph. "But I must own I was not altogether uninfluenced by a desire to see this great city, which I have never beheld since I was a mere boy, and too young to remember it."

"You are a mere boy still," rejoined the miser; "and if you will take my advice, you will go back more quickly than you came. But I know you wont, so it's idle to urge you. Youth will rush headlong to destruction. Young man, you don't know what is before you, but I'll tell you—it's ruin—ruin—ruin!—dy'e hear me?—ruin!"

"I hear you, sir," replied Randulph, frowning.

"Hum!" said the miser, shrugging his shoulders, "so you wont be advised? But it's the way with all young people, and I ought not to expect you to prove an exception. I suppose you mean to stay with your two uncles, Abel and Trussell Beechcroft?"

"Such is my intention," replied Randulph.

"I have not seen them for years," pursued Scarve; "but if you are not acquainted with them, I will give you their characters in brief. Abel is sour, but sure—Trussell, pleasant, plausible, but hollow. And you will judge of my candour when I tell you that the first hates me, while the latter is well disposed towards me. You will take to the one and dislike the other, but you will find out your error in time. Mind what I say. And now let us look at the packet, for I have kept you here too long, and have nothing to offer you."

"There's nearly a glass of wine left in the bottle in the cupboard," interposed Jacob, who had stood stock still during the whole of this interview, with the candle in his hand. "Perhaps the gentleman would like it after his journey."

"Hold your tongue, sirrah," cried the miser, sharply, "and snuff the candle—not with your fingers, knave!" he added, as Jacob applied his immense digits to the tufted wick, and stamped upon the snuff as he cast it on the floor. "What can this packet contain? Let me see," he continued, breaking the seal and disclosing a letter, which he opened, and found it contained a small memorandum. As he glanced at it, a shade came over his countenance. He did not attempt to read the letter, but folding it over the small piece of paper, unlocked a small, strong box, that stood at his feet beneath the table, and placed them both within it.

"It is time you went to your uncles, young man," he said to Randulph, in an altered tone, and more coldly than before; "I shall be glad to see you some other time. Good night."

"I shall be truly happy to call here again, sir," replied Randulph, looking earnestly at Hilda.

"Jacob, show Mr. Crew to the door," cried the miser, hastily.

"Good night, Miss Scarve," said Randulph, still lingering. "Do you often walk in the parks?"

"My daughter never stirs abroad," replied the miser, motioning him away. "There, get you gone. Good night, good night!—A troublesome visitor," he added, to Hilda, as Jacob departed with the young man.

Jacob having again placed the candle in the lantern, unbolted and unlocked the door, and issuing forth, they found Peter Pokerich standing beside the horse.

"You may thank me that your horse is not gone, sir," said the latter. "People in London are not quite so honest as the villagers in Cheshire. Well, you've seen Mr. Scarve, I suppose, sir? What do you think of him, and of his daughter?"

"I pity your taste in not admiring her," replied Randulph.

"Not admiring her!" cried Jacob, with a horse laugh. "Did he tell you he didn't admire her? Why, he's dying with love of her, and I make no doubt, was jealous of your good looks—ho! ho!"

"You're insolent, Mr. Jacob," rejoined Peter, angrily.

"What! you want another taste of my crabstick, do you?" said Jacob. "It's close at hand."

"Don't quarrel, friends," laughed Randulph, springing into the saddle. "Good night, Jacob. I shall hope, ere long, to see your old master and young mistress again." So saying, he struck spurs into his steed, and rode off in the direction of Westminster Bridge.

"Well," said Peter, as he crossed over the way to his own dwelling, "I've managed to get a letter out of his saddle bag, at all events. Perhaps it'll tell me who and what he is, and whether he's a Jacobite and Papist. If so, let him look to himself; for as sure as my name's Peter Pokerich, I'll hang him. And now for the letter."

CHAPTER III.

THE BROTHERS BEECHCROFT—MR. JUKES—THE ARRIVAL—THE WALK IN SAINT JAMES'S PARK—RANDULPH'S INTRODUCTION TO BEAU VILLIERS AND LADY BRABAZON.

THE two brothers Beechcroft, Randulph's uncles, lived in a retired house in Lambeth, close to the river, and a little to the west of the palace. Both were middle-aged men,—that is to say—for it is difficult to determine what is the middle age now-a-days, though it was not quite so difficult to fix the period in the last century—one was fifty-six, and the other ten years younger, and both bachelors. That they lived together, and in this retired way, was not so much matter of choice as of necessity on the part of the younger brother, Trussell, for he would have preferred, if it had been in his power, a gayer kind of life. But fortune decreed it otherwise. The father of the brothers was a wealthy merchant, who, being determined to make an elder son, left the bulk of his property, except some trifling bequests to his daughter Sophia (Randulph's mother) and Trussell, to his first-born Abel. Abel, however, behaved very handsomely upon the occasion. He instantly made over to his brother and sister what he considered their rightful share of the property. In neither case did the gift prosper. Trussell soon squandered away his modicum in gaming and every other sort of extravagance, while Sophia's portion was dissipated, though in a different way, by her thoughtless and improvident husband. There are, indeed, so many ways of getting rid of money, that it is difficult to say which is the most expeditious; nor would it be easy to tell whether Trussell or his sister was longest benefited by their brother's bounty. A small sum had been settled upon Mrs. Crew by her father, at the time of her marriage, and on this she now lived.

Completely reduced in circumstances, Trussell was thrown upon his brother, who very kindly received him, but compelled him to live in his own quiet manner. This not suiting the more mercurial brother, he more than once tried to live on his own resources; but, failing in the attempt, he was compelled to come back to the old quarters. Now that age had somewhat calmed him, he was more reconciled to his situation. Having little money to spend, for his brother, of course, regulated his allowance, he could not indulge in any of the dearer amusements—he could neither play nor frequent the more expensive coffee-houses, clubs, theatres, opera, or other places of public entertainment, except on rare occasions. But he was daily to be seen sauntering on the Mall, or in Piccadilly, and as he had a tolerably extensive acquaintance with the *beau monde*, he was at no loss for society. The Cocoa-Tree and White's were too extravagant for him,—the Smyrna and the St. James's too exclusively political,—Young Man's too military,—Old Man's too much frequented by stock-jobbers,—and Little Man's by sharpers,—so he struck a middle course, and adopted the British. This was during the day-time; but after the play, if by chance he went thither, he would drop into Tom's or Will's coffee-houses, to talk over the performance—to play a game at picquet—or to lose a half-crown at faro. But nothing would tempt him to risk even the smallest sum at hazard. The ordinaries he rarely attended,—never, indeed, unless invited by a friend to dine with him at one of them.

Such was Trussell Beechcroft's daily routine. Perfectly well bred, of easy and polished manners, good taste, and imperturbable temper, he was an acceptable companion everywhere, and it was a matter of surprise to all that he had not got on better in the world. Trussell was about the middle height, somewhat corpulent and short-necked, and had a round full face. He was by no means handsome, nor had he ever been so, but his features were decidedly prepossessing. He was scrupulously neat in his attire, and a little, perhaps, too attentive to personal decoration for an elderly gentleman; at least, his brother thought so.

Abel Beechcroft was a very different character. Some early disappointment in life, in a matter of the heart, it was reported, had soured his temper, and given a misanthropic turn to his mind. He mingled little with the world, and when he did so, it was only to furnish himself with fresh material for railing at its follies. He was a confirmed woman-hater, shunned the society of the sex, and never would see his sister after her marriage, because she had in some way or other, though in what was never disclosed, been connected with the bitterest event in his life. In person Abel was short, thin, and slightly deformed, having very high shoulders, almost amounting to a hump; and his neck being short, like his brother's, his large chin almost reposed upon his chest. His features were somewhat coarse, with a long, prominent nose, and pointed chin, but his broad, massive forehead, and keen gray eyes, gave a great degree of intelligence to them, while his shrewd, satirical expression redeemed them from anything like a commonplace character.

It has been said that he lived quietly, but he also lived very comfortably. Nothing could be more snug than his retreat at Lambeth, with its fine garden, its green houses and hot-houses, its walls covered with fruit-trees, and its summer-house, with windows commanding the river, and frescoed ceiling, painted in the time of Charles the Second, at which epoch the house was built, and the garden laid out. Then he had some choice pictures of the Flemish school, two or three of Charles's beauties, undoubted originals, by Lely and Kneller, but placed in his brother's room, to be out of his own sight—an arrangement to which Trussell raised no objection; plenty of old china, and old japanned cabinets; a good library, in which the old poets, the old dramatists, and the old chroniclers, found a place; and, above all, a large cellar abundantly stocked with old wine. He was, in fact, by no means indifferent to good cheer, and enjoyed life, in his own way, with a keen zest. He had an old butler who managed all for him, for he would never suffer a female servant to come into his sight; and this person, Josiah Jukes, or as he was generally called, Mr. Jukes, was the only person that ever presumed to contradict him.

Abel Beechcroft, who had expected his nephew's arrival early in the day, and had, in fact, waited dinner for him—a compliment he very rarely paid to any one—became, as he did not appear, waspish and peevish to a degree that his brother's patience could hardly tolerate. He grumbled during the whole of dinner, which he declared was uneatable, and when the cloth was removed, began to find fault with the wine.

"This bottle is corked," he said, as he tasted the first glass; "all the fault of that boy. I wish I had never promised to receive him. I dare say some accident has happened to him. I hope it may turn out so."

"You don't hope any such thing, sir," remarked Mr. Jukes, a little, round, rosy, good-humoured-looking man, in a plain livery—"you don't hope any such thing, so don't belie yourself, and do your kind heart an injustice. The wine's not corked," he added, taking the bottle to the side-board, and tasting it. "Try another glass. Your palate's out of order."

"And well it may be, Jukes," replied Abel, "for my digestion has been sadly disturbed by this waiting. Ah! I find I was mistaken," he added, tasting the glass poured out for him; "there *is* nothing the matter with the wine."

"On the contrary, sir, I think it an excellent bottle," remarked Trussell, and I propose that we drink our worthy sister's good health—Heaven bless her! how much I should like to see her!—and her son's safe and speedy arrival."

"Come, sir, you cannot refuse that pledge," said Mr. Jukes, filling his master's glass. "I must drink it myself," he added, again carrying the bottle to the sideboard.

"Well, I wonder what we shall find Randulph like?" mused Trussell, "for we have not seen him since he was a little fellow not higher than this table, when his poor father brought him to town."

"By the same token that his poor father borrowed two thousand pounds of me at the time, every farthing of which I lost," growled Abel.

"Well, well—no matter, sir. You never felt the loss, so what does it signify?" remarked Mr. Jukes.

"I've no doubt Randulph will be a very fine young man," pursued Trussell. "Sophia writes word that he is her exact image, and she was certainly the finest woman of her day."

"Ay, ay!" cried Abel, shrugging his shoulders uneasily. "Change the subject, brother—change the subject."

For some minutes there was a profound silence, which was at length broken by Abel.

"I suppose you mean to take this young lad, if he comes, to see all the sights, brother?" he remarked.

"Oh, of course, sir—of course," replied Trussell; "I must introduce him to the world—show him all the public places and public characters—and give him a slight taste of town life."

"Let it be *a very slight taste*, brother," rejoined Abel, sharply, "and not enough to give him an appetite for such pernicious food. Our nephew must be perfectly unsophisticated, and, I doubt not, from what I hear of him—and, indeed, know of him—a youth of excellent principles. I think his conduct, in surrendering his estates to his father's creditors, noble. I have great hopes of him, and if he turns out well, will take care he does not lose, in the end, by his disinterestedness. But that depends upon himself, and in some degree on you."

"On me, sir!—how so?" asked Trussell.

"Thus," replied the elder brother—"thus: he is coming to town; you will give him certain introductions; these may turn out to his advantage—may raise him in society, in the world. If so, well and good. But if you only teach him to ape the follies and vices of those of a higher rank than himself—if you make him a weak and frivolous, and, perhaps, a vicious character—if, in short, you expose him to a test which he cannot bear, I cast him off, and will have nothing to do with him."

"And provided he answers your expectations, do you propose to leave him a fortune, sir, or to give him one?" inquired Trussell, curiously.

"Why do you ask, brother—why do you ask?" demanded Abel, eyeing him narrowly from beneath his great bent brows.

"Nay, I only asked out of mere curiosity, sir," replied Trussell, seizing the bottle in some confusion. "I could have no other motive."

Abel coughed drily.

"I'll bring you more wine in a moment, gentlemen," interposed Mr. Jukes; "the bottle's empty, Mr. Trussell."

"So it is, Mr. Jukes," replied Trussell. "Well, I'll do my best, sir, to be a Mentor to him, and I hope I may succeed in carrying him through the fiery furnace unscathed. But you mustn't be too hard upon him if he should be guilty of some slight indiscretion. You must recollect, sir, that we have been young ourselves; and that few men have their passions so much under control as yourself."

"I!" exclaimed Abel, with bitter contempt. "You are mocking me, brother. But go on."

"I've nothing more to add, sir," replied Trussell.

"Then I have," said Abel, in a low, deep tone, and bending towards his brother. "Trussell, one word more on this subject, and I dismiss it. Whether I make my nephew my heir or not, will make no difference to you. What I have done, I have done, and I shall do no more. You can have no motive, therefore, for leading him astray."

"I am grieved you should think me capable of such a base design," replied Trussell, colouring deeply; "but I will take no offence at what you say. I know my own heart and intentions too well."

"I only gave you a hint, brother," replied Abel, chuckling. "I know that a shrewd man of the world—that is, a clever scoundrel—would act in such a way; and if he succeeded, would be applauded for his conduct. I am glad you take the caution in good part."

Here Mr. Jukes opportunely entered with a fresh bottle of wine, which proved in admirable condition; and Abel having expended his ill-humour, the conversation was carried on in a much more agreeable manner for an hour, when both brothers adjourned to the garden, and smoked a pipe in the summer-house. It was a charming evening; and the river, which was studded with boats, presented a lively and pleasant sight. As night drew on, however, Abel, in spite of himself, could not conceal his uneasiness.

"Something must have happened to the lad, Jukes," he said: "my mind misgives me. He has been robbed, and perhaps maltreated, by some of the highwaymen haunting Finchley Common."

"Poh! poh! don't make yourself uneasy," replied Mr. Jukes. "He'll be here presently, I'll warrant him. What has he to be robbed of?"

"Nothing much—that's certain," replied Abel. "But it is getting late. It must be near ten o'clock. He wont be even in time for supper."

"I've ordered supper to be kept back an hour, sir," said Mr. Jukes.

"The devil you have!" cried Abel, angrily. "And do you think I'll submit to such an arrangement? Would you ruin my digestion, rascal? My stomach is as regular as clockwork. Serve it directly, sirrah!"

As Mr. Jukes departed to see his master's commands obeyed, he was agreeably surprised by a loud knocking at the outer door, and waddling thither, with the other servants, as fast as he could, was enchanted to find the summons proceeded from the expected guests. Randulph's horse was taken charge of, and he himself speedily ushered into the presence of his uncles, who both welcomed him warmly and affectionately—though Abel could not help mixing up with his greetings some reproofs for his late arrival. Randulph explained that several delays had occurred to him on his journey, and concluded by an account of his visit to Mr. Scarve. At the mention of this name, Randulph observed both his uncles look extremely blank. Uncle Abel, in particular, seemed angry and disconcerted.

"You must never go near that house again," said the latter, at length, in an authoritative tone. "Mark me—on pain of my displeasure, I forbid it"

"Why so, uncle?" asked Randulph, who had been schooled by his mother to treat Abel with great deference.

"Don't ask me," replied Abel. "It is sufficient that I forbid you."

Randulph felt disposed to remonstrate, more especially as the figure of the beautiful Hilda rose before his recollection; but uncle Abel at that moment turning away, his sleeve was plucked by uncle Trussell, who whispered in his ear, "Don't disobey him, or you will mar your future fortunes."

Thus advised, the young man made no reply. Soon after this, supper was served. Many questions were put to his nephew by uncle Trussell respecting his sister, her state of health, and other matters, all of which were answered very satisfactorily. The time for parting, however, came, and Randulph was not sorry to retire. The only thing that dwelt in his mind, and clouded his satisfaction, was uncle Abel's peremptory interdiction against his visits to the miser, and he felt he should have difficulty in observing it.

"It is strange," he thought, "that my mother should never have answered any of my inquiries respecting Mr. Scarve. She seemed as mysterious as my uncles. I don't much like the old miser. But the daughter is charming. Heigho! I must positively see her again, even if I incur uncle Abel's sovereign displeasure."

Next morning, the uncles and their nephew met at breakfast, at an early hour, when the subjects discussed on the previous night were renewed. Now that he had completely shaken off the fatigue of his journey, Randulph looked so handsome, that both his relations were greatly taken with him, and, on the conclusion of some remark, uncle Abel said, as if unconsciously, "He is, indeed, very like his mother."

Some few hours were then spent by the young man in arranging his little wardrobe, and in looking out some letters which he had promised to deliver. He missed one, however, and after turning over every article he possessed more than a dozen times, concluded he had lost it. What made the matter more provoking was, that he could not recollect to whom it was addressed. As he had received it amongst others from his mother, to whom it had been committed by a friend, he mentioned its loss in a dispatch which he proceeded to write to her, and also detailed his safe arrival, and the impressions made upon him by his uncles, and by the miser and his daughter, whose beauty he highly extolled. His letter concluded, he went down stairs, and found both his uncles prepared for a stroll. Accordingly, they all three sallied forth, and, crossing Westminster Bridge, shaped their course towards Saint James's Park. As they passed the Little Sanctuary, Randulph could not help gazing towards the dungeon-like dwelling which enshrined her who had made so deep an impression upon him. Uncle Abel noticed his look, and partly divining the cause of it, said, "Remember what I told you. Disobey me, and you will rue it."

Randulph would have made some reply, but he was checked by a significant glance from uncle Trussell.

Passing through the Gate House, they entered the Park by a small doorway at the end of Prince's-court. It was now noon, and a warm and genial day. The avenues of trees then extending between this point and Rosamond's Pond were crowded with persons of both sex, and of all ranks, summoned forth by the fineness of the weather.

Amused by the scene, Randulph gazed with much curiosity at all presented to his view. Passing by the Decoy, the party skirted the great canal, and, leaving Rosamond's Pond on the left, proceeded towards Buckingham House.

Just at this juncture, uncle Trussell caught sight of a gay party approaching, and exclaimed, in a joyful tone, to his nephew, "As I live, we are most fortunate! There is the leader of fashion, Beau Villiers, coming towards us. You shall know him, nephew —you shall know him! The ladies he is walking with are Lady Brabazon and the Honourable Clementina Brabazon—a fine girl, Clementina—a remarkably fine girl; perfect in style and manners —quite a toast among the sparks. The old fellow at her side, Sir Singleton Spinke, was a great beau in his time, though never equal to Villiers, who far surpasses even his prototype, Beau Fielding, in style and taste. You shall know them all."

"And nice acquaintances you will make!" remarked uncle Abel, sneeringly.

"Never mind him, Randulph," whispered uncle Trussell. "If you know this set, and they like you, you may know whom you please. Beau Villiers commands all society, from the highest down to—to——"

"Mr. Trussell Beechcroft," replied uncle Abel.

"Well, down to me, if you please," rejoined uncle Trussell, "and that shows it does not extend too low. But, Randulph, I beg you to look at the beau. Did you ever see a finer man?"

"He is very handsome, certainly," replied Randulph, "and remarkably well dressed."

"He is a great coxcomb, a great rake, and a great gamester, Randulph," said uncle Abel; "beware of him."

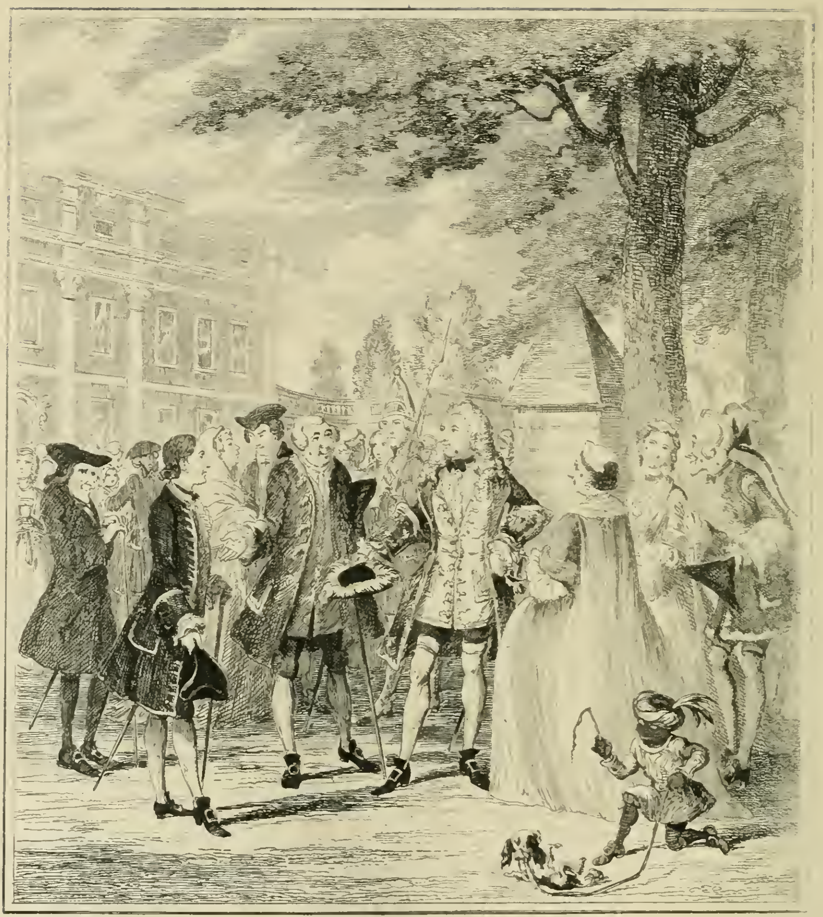
"Tush, never mind what he says," rejoined uncle Trussell, who really wished to have the éclat of introducing his handsome nephew to the beau. "Come along!"

So saying, he took his nephew's arm, and hurried him forward. Pushing their way through the throng, they soon approached the sentry-box opposite Buckingham House, near which they encountered the party in question.

Beau Villiers, who was, indeed, a remarkably handsome man, and dressed in the extremity of the mode, wore a light-blue embossed velvet coat, embroided with silver, with broad cuffs similarly ornamented; a white waistcoat of the richest silk, likewise laced with silver; and tawny velvet breeches, partly covered with pearl-coloured silk hose, drawn above the knee, and secured with silver garters. His dress was completed by shoes of black Spanish leather, fastened by large diamond buckles, and a superb Ramillies periwig of the lightest flaxen hair, which set off his brilliant complexion, and fine eyes, to admiration. He carried a three-cornered hat, fringed with feathers, and a clouded cane, mounted with a valuable pebble.

Near the beau, walked Lady Brabazon, a gorgeous dame of about five-and-forty, and still possessed of great personal attractions, which she omitted no means of displaying. She wore a hoop, and a white and silver satin sack. Struck by Randulph's figure at a distance, she had pointed him out to the beau, who thereupon vouchsafed to look towards him. Behind Lady Brabazon, came her daughter, Clementina, a very pretty and very affected blonde of two-and-twenty, with an excessively delicate complexion, fair hair, summer blue eyes, and a very mincing gait. She was exquisitely dressed in the last new mode, with a small escaloped lace cap, her hair crisply curled at the sides, a triple row of pearls round her neck, and a diamond cross attached to the chain; and though she pretended to be interested in the discourse of the old knight, it was evident her regards were attracted by the handsome young stranger.

As to the old beau, he was, indeed, supremely ridiculous. He was attired in a richly-embroidered cinnamon-coloured velvet coat, with fur cuffs of a preposterous size, each as large as a modern muff. His pantaloon legs were covered with pink silk hose; his wrinkled features were rouged and bepatched; and his wig was tied with a large bow, and had such an immense queue to it, that it looked as if a Patagonian dragon-fly had


George Cruikshank

perched on the back of his neck. Lady Brabazon was attended by a little black page, in a turban and eastern dress, who had charge of her favourite lap-dog.

While uncle Abel drew on one side to allow the introduction to take place, and to witness it, uncle Trussell stepped forward, and, bowing obsequiously to Beau Villiers, pointed to Randulph, who stood on his right.

"Permit me," he said, "to introduce my nephew, Mr. Randulph Crew, to you, Mr. Villiers. He is fresh from the country. But even there, your reputation has reached him."

"I am happy to make his acquaintance," replied the beau, courteously returning Randulph's bow, and eyeing him curiously at the same time. "On my faith, your ladyship," he added, aloud, to Lady Brabazon, "the young man is not amiss, but destroyed by his wretched equipments and rustic air."

"I really think something may be made of him," returned Lady Brabazon, in the same loud and confidential tone. Mr. Trussell Beechcroft, introduce your nephew."

"With the greatest pleasure, your ladyship," replied Trussell, obeying her behest.

"Come with us," said Lady Brabazon, to Randulph, after the ceremony had been gone through; "My daughter—Mr. Crew," she added, as they passed along. "By-the-by, who was that strange old man I saw walking with you just now?"

"Who?" rejoined Randulph. evasively, for he felt ashamed, he knew not why, of acknowledging his uncle.

"There he is," said Lady Brabazon, pointing her fan backwards; "he is staring hard at us, and looks exactly like a bailiff."

"It is my uncle Abel," replied Randulph, in some confusion.

"Your uncle Abel!" cried Lady Brabazon, with a scream of laughter. "Then the sooner you get rid of uncle Abel the better."

Abel could not hear the words, but he heard the laugh, and saw the gesture, as well as his nephew's confusion, and knew that he was the object of it. He turned away in the opposite direction, muttering to himself as he went, "So, he has taken the first step."

CHAPTER IV.

ABEL BEECHCROFT'S SENSIBILITY—HIS INSTRUCTIONS TO MR. JUKES—A SECOND NEPHEW—THE LOAN—MR. CRIPPS'S SENSE OF HONOUR—THE BRIBE.

Uncle Abel returned home by himself about two o'clock, in a very ill humour indeed, and, vouchsafing no answer to Mr. Jukes, who smilingly inquired where he had left the two gentlemen, proceeded at once to the library. Knowing the peculiarity of his master's temper, the discreet butler left him to himself, but ventured, unsummoned, into his presence in about half an hour, and found him in the act of tearing up a letter, and throwing the fragments into the grate."

"What brings you here, sir?" cried Abel, turning sharply upon him. "I didn't ring the bell."

"I know you didn't sir," replied Mr. Jukes; "but I was certain you wanted me, nevertheless."

"You were certain of no such thing, sirrah," rejoined Abel, in a tone that contradicted the asperity of his words, "and you presume too much on your long services."

"I don't presume too much on your kindness," rejoined Mr. Jukes, in accents oddly enough compounded of familiarity and respect. "I see plainly that something has gone wrong, and perhaps I may be able to set it right."

"Well, shut the door, Jukes," returned Abel, seating himself, "and put the window down,—why was it left open?—you know I can't bear a draught. What do you think of my nephew?"

"That he's a remarkably fine young man, sir," replied the butler. "I haven't seen a handsomer man this many a day. And Mr. Trussell was quite right when he said he was like your sister. He's the perfect picture of her as she was when—"

"Never mind the likeness, Jukes," interrupted Abel, hastily; "I don't want to know what you think of his good looks. They're obvious enough—too obvious by far—for, trust me, whatever you may think of the matter, it is a great misfortune in a man to be too handsome. What I wish to have is your opinion of his disposition."

"I think it equal to his good looks, sir," replied the butler, promptly. "It will be strange indeed, if he doesn't turn out a fine character."

"Hum!" exclaimed Mr. Abel, with one of his sneers, "so that is your opinion, Mr. Jukes. I thought you a better judge."

"I see what you're driving at, sir," replied the butler; "but it wont answer with me. You're displeased with your nephew, and want me to disparage him; but I tell you plainly, I wont. And if I were foolish enough, and base enough to do so, no one would be more angry with me than yourself. I think Mr. Randulph a very fine young man, and a very promising young man; and I'm truly happy to find, since you're never likely to marry, that you'll have such a worthy successor."

Accustomed as he was to his master's fitful humours, Mr. Jukes was not prepared for the effect which his words produced, or he would have cut off his tongue sooner than have uttered them. Abel, who was gazing at him fixedly as he commenced, cast down his eyes at the close of his speech, and pressed his hand convulsively to his brow. He remained silent for some moments, and then, giving vent to his suppressed respiration in a groan, walked to the window, and appeared to be looking out into the garden. Mr. Jukes allowed him to remain undisturbed for a few minutes, and then approached him.

"I'm extremely sorry for what I said, sir," he remarked, penitentially; "I ought to have known better."

"You said nothing, Jukes," replied Abel, sadly, yet kindly, "but what I ought to have heard unmoved, and I am ashamed of my own weakness. It is not because I shall go childless to the grave that I have exhibited this emotion, but because your allusion has opened old wounds, and brought the past too palpably and painfully before me. You know the secrets of my heart, and will understand what a train of emotion a chance word might awaken. I am an old man, Jukes,—callous in feeling on most points—but there is one point on which I am as sensitive as ever. It is that disappointment—that blighting which I met with from—from—I cannot bring myself to utter her name. The wound I then received is incurable. I shall bear it to my dying day."

"I hope not, sir—I hope not," sympathized the butler.

"I hate the sex, Jukes!" cried Abel, almost fiercely. "There is no faith, no honesty in it—any more than there is true friendship in men. I never yet knew a woman whom I could thoroughly esteem—nor a man on whose friendship I could entirely rely. If I could make an exception in the latter case, it would be in favour of yourself."

"And if a servant was ever true to his master, I am true to you, sir," replied Mr. Jukes, earnestly. "But you expect too much from human nature. Our imperfect condition is to blame, not ourselves. In my opinion, there are more true-hearted women than the reverse; and I should be sorry to think otherwise. But if you search the world over for one who could come up to your notions of perfection, I fear you would not find her. The best of women have some faults, and the worst many redeeming qualities. But with all their faults they are the best part of creation. So at least I think, and so you would think too, sir, if your choice had not been so unhappily fixed."

"Do not advert to it again, Jukes," cried Abel, repressing a pang.

"I've done, sir—I've done!" rejoined Mr. Jukes, hastily "And now may I venture to ask what has displeased you with your nephew?"

"Perhaps I ought not to be angry with him," replied Abel; "but I watched him closely during his introduction to Beau Villiers and Lady Brabazon on the Mall this morning, and saw that he was completely dazzled by them. Nay, I clearly detected, by certain looks and gestures that passed between him and Lady Brazen, for such should be her title, that she put him to the blush about his relationship to me. I do not blame him for this, because I know what effect appearances have upon young persons, and how difficult it is to understand real worth when set against the glitter of rank and fashion, however worthless or vicious the latter may be. I do not blame him, I say, but I lament that he did not bear his first trial better."

"You should blame Lady Brabazon, not him, sir," rejoined Mr. Jukes. "Some ladies of her rank have a way of abashing modest young men, and delight in doing it. And then I'm sure I may tell you without offence, that your dress is scarcely becoming your real station in life. No, sir, I don't wonder Mr. Randulph felt a little embarrassed. I may just as well complain of my graceless nephew, Crackenthorpe Cripps, who serves Mr. Villiers, the very gentleman you've mentioned. The rascal will never own me if he meets me in the Park, though he's extremely glad to call me 'nunks,' and wheedle me out of a crown at other times. But what do I care for his impertinence? Nothing at all."

"Well, Jukes, perhaps you are right," said Abel, after a moment's reflection: "and perhaps I am guilty of as much weakness as my nephew himself, in feeling hurt by the matter. I had written to his mother on the subject; but I have just destroyed the letter."

"I am glad to hear it, sir," replied Mr. Jukes.

"And now there is another point, about which I feel considerable uneasiness," pursued Abel. "Randulph, as you know, has seen Hilda Scarve; and, short as the interview was, it was long enough it seems for her to produce a strong impression upon him. Now," he continued, sternly, and emphatically, "he never shall marry that girl, with my consent!—never, Jukes! And if he should marry her, he never shall have a shilling of mine. I have forbidden him to visit the house; but I am apprehensive he will disobey my injunctions. If he goes there without my knowledge, I will shut my doors against him."

"If you do so, you will act very harshly and very unjustly sir," replied Mr. Jukes; "and so I tell you beforehand."

"The fault will be his own," rejoined Abel, coldly. "I have warned him. It must be your part to see Jacob Post, if the fellow is still with the miser, and ascertain whether Randulph visits the house. D'ye understand?"

"Perfectly," replied Jukes, "but I don't like the job."

"Like it or not, you will do as I bid you," continued Abel, peremptorily. "And you have not yet received the whole of your instructions. You say that your nephew serves Mr. Villiers. Bribe him to bring word what Randulph does in his master's society; whether he games, drinks, or riots—in a word, how he goes on."

"There will be no necessity to bribe Crackenthorpe to tell all this," returned Mr. Jukes. "But I repeat, I don't like such underhand proceedings. They're unworthy of you."

"It is the only way of arriving at the truth," replied Abel. "And now leave me. I must write to my sister about this Scarve—curse on the name—and will desire her to interdict her son from going near the house."

"In my humble opinion you are taking the precise course to attract him thither, sir," rejoined Mr. Jukes. "If he never desired to go before, he will do so now. It's human nature, sir, Tell me not to open that cupboard, and I should long to do it. Recollect Bluebeard, sir."

"Bluebeard be hanged!" cried Abel, angrily. "Go and look after dinner. Serve it at four to a moment. I wont wait an instant for them—not an instant."

The butler bowed and retired, while Abel commenced a second letter to his sister.

As Mr. Jukes approached the butler's pantry, whither he repaired after quitting his master, he was startled by hearing a voice issue from it, singing with some taste, but in a very affected style, the following snatch:—

"I have been in love, and in debt, and in drink,
This many and many a year;
And these are three plagues, enough, I should think,
For one poor mortal to bear."

"There's my rascally nephew, Crackenthorpe," muttered Mr Jukes. "I wont see him. He's come upon his old errand."

Here the singer again exalted his voice:—

"There is nothing but money can cure me,
And rid me of all my pain;
'Twill pay all my debts, and remove all my lets,
And my mistress, that cannot endure me,
Will love me, and love me again.
Fal de ral."

"Ay, money's always the burden of his song," muttered Mr. Jukes. "However, I must see him, I suppose. My master's orders are peremptory."

With this, he pushed open the door, and discovered his nephew leaning in a very careless attitude against the table. Mr. Crackenthorpe Cripps was a young man of about three-and-twenty, of very dissipated appearance, with a slim, well-proportioned figure, and tolerably good features, only marred by an expression of cunning and assurance. He was dressed in a cast-off suit of his master's, and, being precisely the same height, and nearly the same make, as the renowned beau, his clothes fitted him remarkably well. He would scarcely have been taken for a valet, for in defiance of the regulations against the wearing of offensive weapons by footmen, then somewhat strictly enforced, from the quarrels arising among those gentry, he carried a silver-hilted sword. His coat was of scarlet, trimmed with gold somewhat tarnished, but still presenting a sufficiently gay appearance; his waistcoat of green flowered silk; his breeches of yellow velvet; his cravat was laced; and the queue of the wig was left unfastened, allowing the hair to float negligently over his shoulders, to add, no doubt, to the rakish air he affected. A clouded cane, with a large silken tassel, completed his equipment. From his air, his dress, and his pretensions, this coxcomb was known amongst his fraternity as Beau Cripps—a title of which he was not a little vain, and strove to support. On seeing his uncle, the valet did not alter his position, but contented himself with waving his hand condescendingly to him.

"How are ye, nunks?" he said. "Give you the *bon jour*, as we bucks say. Sweet old soul, how I love thee! 'Pon rep! 'tis a pleasure rather than a duty to visit thee."

"I beg you'll never put yourself to any trouble on my account, nephew," replied Mr. Jukes, somewhat testily; and I must request, whenever you visit this house in future, that you'll bear in mind the situation I hold in it. Amuse yourself with your opera ballads elsewhere."

"Cudslid, nunks!" cried Mr. Cripps. "you are far more particular than the Duke of Doncaster's gentleman himself. Why I do what I like when I visit him."

"Perhaps so," rejoined Mr. Jukes; "but you sha'n't do what you like here, I promise you."

"Devil take me, if I ever heard a better jest," cried Mr. Cripps, forcing a laugh; "but you were always a wit, nunks. Try my snush. You'll find it excellent. It's the beau's own mixture, 'pon rep!"

"And the beau's own box, I'll be sworn, nephew," replied Mr. Junks, helping himself to a pinch. "Well," he added, somewhat mollified by the attention, "will you take anything after your walk?"

"Walk, nunks!" echoed Mr. Cripps, with a look of supreme contempt. "Do you think I would walk while there was a conveyance to be had? No; a coach and a pair of skulls brought me hither. But since you press me, I don't mind a glass of Bordeaux, or Rhenish. I know old Abel has a prime cellar, so suppose we tap a flask. Mrs. Nicholson, our housekeeper, persuaded me to swallow a cup of green tea before I left home, and plague on't! it has shattered my nerves sadly."

"It's the punch you swallowed last night that has shattered your nerves, nephew, and not the tea," rejoined Mr. Jukes, shaking his head: "I can't give you claret, or hock, but if a glass of ale would sit well on your stomach——"

"A glass of ale!" repeated Mr. Cripps, with infinite disgust. "Faugh! I'll none of it. And as to punch, know, O ignorant nunks, that the liquors quaffed by me last night were champagne, burgundy, and hermitage. Thou starest, but 'tis a fact, 'pon rep!

"Let us drink and be merry,
Dance, joke, and rejoice,
With claret and sherry,
Theorbo and voice.

The changeable world
To our joy is unjust;
All treasure's uncertain,
So down with your dust.

"Apropos of 'dust,' it was on that very subject I came hither. I want you to post the cole, nunks—to come down with the rhino—to disburse."

"I guessed your errand, Crackenthorpe," replied Mr. Jukes. "You've been gaming, sirrah!"

"Why, i'faith, nunks, I must confess to a trifle lost at picquet to the duke's gentleman," replied Mr. Cripps.

"What do you call a trifle, eh, nephew?" inquired Mr. Jukes.

"Why—why—" hesitated Mr. Cripps, applying to the snuff-box, and endeavouring to carry off his embarrassment by additional assurance—"twenty crowns—not a farthing more, 'pon rep!"

"Twenty crowns!" exclaimed Mr. Jukes, raising his hands in unfeigned astonishment. "A valet drink champagne and burgundy, and lose twenty crowns at picquet! What will the world come to!"

"No sermonizing, nunks," replied Mr. Cripps, "but down with the dust, as I said before. What will you let me have?"

"A crown, if it will rid me of you?" rejoined Mr. Jukes, impatiently.

"Devil take me if I stir without ten crowns!" replied Mr. Cripps. "Therefore, if you desire my absence, you will come down at once. Ten, by this light—ten."

"Well, anything to get rid of you," replied Mr. Jukes, "but this is the last advance I'll ever make."

"So you always say, nunks," laughed the valet; "but I'll refund it in a week, 'pon rep!"

"I don't expect it," rejoined Mr. Jukes, unlocking a cupboard, and opening a drawer within it, from which he took ten crown-pieces. Remember, these are my savings, nephew."

"And you couldn't apply them to a better purpose than in assisting your sister's son," returned the valet, coolly pocketing the money. "*Mille remercimens!*—sha'n't forget the favour, 'pon rep! But I've trespassed too much on your time. *Au revoir!* I kiss your hand, nunks."

"Not so fast, Crackenthorpe," replied Mr. Jukes. "You must do me a service in return for my loan. My master's nephew, Mr. Randulph Crew, has just been introduced to Mr. Villiers; and my master fears, and with reason, that this introduction will lead to little good. But, be that as it may, you must bring me accurate information of all their proceedings."

"Rely upon knowing every thing, nunks," replied Mr. Cripps

"I haven't done yet," pursued Mr. Jukes. There is a certain Mr. Scarve who lives in the Little Sanctuary——"

"What, the miser, whom folks nickname Starve?" interrupted Cripps. "I know him. My master has borrowed large sums of money from him. But what of him, nunks?"

"Why, I wish to ascertain whether Mr. Randulph ever visits the house—that's all," rejoined Mr. Jukes.

"What! old Abel is afraid of his nephew borrowing money, eh?" replied Mr. Cripps, laughing. Well, that can be easily managed. A perruquier whom I patronize,—Peter Pokerich by name,—lives opposite old Starve's dwelling, and must know hi servant, if he keeps one; if not, he must know the miser himself. I'll get what you want from him, never fear. Any further commands?" he added, cocking his hat jauntily, and gracefully twirling his cane, preparatory to his departure.

Before Mr. Jukes could reply, the door was opened, and Abel Beechcroft entered the room. He stared so sternly at Mr. Cripps, that the confidence of the latter completely deserted him, and hastily taking off his hat, he would have retreated if Abel had not stopped him.

"What are you doing here, rascal?" he asked.

"Only come to see my uncle, 'pon rep, Mr. Beechcroft!" stammered the valet.

"Only come to rob him of his gains, knave, you mean," rejoined Abel, sarcastically. But hark ye, sirrah! I, like my butler, have a plague of a nephew, and he has just become acquainted with your master—your foppish, rakish, gambling master,—and I cannot hope will escape the taint of such infectious society. Now, I want to know how quickly, and to what extent, he becomes corrupted by it. You must play the spy upon him, fellow."

"My uncle has told me your request, Mr. Beechcroft," rejoined Mr. Cripps; "but really, 'pon rep! if you put the matter in such an objectionable light—if you term it 'playing the spy'—I cannot consistently with my—my rep-rep-reputation, comply with your request."

"What, you are scrupulous, eh, rascal?" laughed Abel, derisively, "and affect as nice a sense of honour as your master? But like him, you have your price. Bring me the information I require, and you shall have double the sum, whatever it may be, out of which you have just cajoled your uncle."

"That will be twenty crowns, Mr. Beechcroft," replied Mr. Cripps. "You're a shrewd judge of human nature, sir, 'pon rep! and have discovered my weak point. No Cripps was ever proof against a bribe."

"Then the bargain is concluded," replied Abel, impatiently. "See him out of the house, Mr. Jukes. And then let this letter be taken to the post. Ah! I hear my brother's and my nephew's voices in the hall. Point out Mr. Randulph to your nephew, Jukes."

The butler nodded, and departed with the valet, while Abel returned to the library Trussell and Randulph were talking and laughing in the hall. On seeing Mr. Cripps, the former instantly directed his nephew's attention to him.

"As I live," he cried, "there is Beau Villiers' gentleman, Mr. Cripps. You must know him, Randulph. It is not amiss to be on terms, even with the servants of the great. Mr. Cripps, a word with you. There's a bow, Randulph,—the true diving bow, bringing the hair before, with the proper water-spaniel shake afterwards, to restore it to its place. Then did you ever see such a wig, such a cravat, or such a sword-knot?"

"Never on a footman, unquestionably," replied Randulph.

"Mr. Cripps," continued Trussell, "this is my nephew, Mr. Randulph Crew, a young gentleman new to the world, as I need scarcely tell you. He has just been presented to your master, and, I flatter myself, has already won his regards."

"Delighted to hear it, Mr. Trussell—delighted," replied Mr. Cripps, with another diving bow,—"but not surprised. Fine young man, 'pon rep! and only wants the *je ne scais quoi* air, which my master will speedily impart to him, to be perfect. Egad, my master must look to his laurels, Mr. Trussell, or your nephew may rob him of 'em—ha! ha! Condescend to try my snush, sir? It's the beau's mixture, with a slight improvement of my own."

"Thankye, thankye, Mr. Cripps," said Trussell, plunging his fingers into the proffered box.

"What is it to be to-night, sir," inquired Mr. Cripps—"the ridotto at Ranelagh, the French play at the Haymarket, or Lady Fazakerly's drum?"

"I'faith, I don't know," replied Trussell, a little embarrassed. "The truth is," he added, in an under-tone, "my brother is rather strait-laced. He has prejudices to which we must occasionally succumb."

"Mr. Cripps smiled significantly, and regaled his nostrils with a very large pinch of snuff.

"You'll take care of my nephew's interest with your master, Mr. Cripps," whispered Trussell, slipping a crown at the same time into his hand.

"As of my own, Mr. Trussell, 'pon rep!" replied Mr. Cripps, in the same tone.

With this, he inclined his person almost to the ground, and departed.

"Well, I've made a tolerable thing of it to-day, 'pon rep!" he muttered to himself, as he whisked out of the house. "Done nunks out of ten crowns—got the promise of twenty from old Abel—received one from Trussell. This Randulph Crew seems to bring me good luck. On my way home I'll call on the little barber—put him on the miser's scent. Something is to be made of this, I perceive. To-night I shall try my hand at the dice-box at the Duke's.

> "My fortune, I hope is reserved for this cast,
> To make me a saver for all my life past;
> Be lucky this once, dice! 'tis all I implore,
> I'll reform then entirely, and tempt you no more."

In this way he went on soliloquizing and singing till he reached his boat, which lay off the stairs near the palace, and, jumping into it, ordered the waterman, with the air of a lord, and several very fashionable imprecations, to row to Parliament Stairs.

CHAPTER V.

ABEL AGAIN CAUTIONS HIS NEPHEW AGAINST THE MISER'S DAUGHTER.

Uncle Abel did not join his nephew and brother till dinner was served, and took little part in the conversation that occurred during the meal. Habituated to his humours, Trussell was as lively and amusing as ever, and rattled away like a young man; but Randulph could not help being oppressed by his elder uncle's grave looks. He also felt, he scarcely knew why, dissatisfied with himself, and wished to regain Abel's esteem. Thus the dinner passed off: the cloth was removed, and the wine placed on the board. The glasses were filled by the attentive Mr. Jukes, who took especial care that on this occasion one of the oldest and choicest bottles should be brought forth, and his attention was speedily rewarded by a very beneficial change in his master's temper.

"Well, Randulph," said Abel, while sipping his second glass, "how do you like your new society?"

"I have seen so little of it at present, sir," replied the young man, "that I can form no precise opinion; but I must say, that I think Mr. Villiers the best bred man I have ever met with, Lady Brabazon a woman of infinite spirit and wit, and her daughter, Clementina——"

"The most beautiful creature you ever beheld!" supplied Abel, laughing drily; "and you have already lost your heart to her."

"So far from thinking her the most beautiful creature I ever beheld," returned Randulph, "she is not to compare with—with ——"

He was about to add the name of the miser's daughter, but the looks of his uncles, both of which were fixed on him, though with a very different expression, checked him.

"I know what you are about to say, Randulph," observed uncle Abel, sternly; "you were going to mention Hilda Scarve. Once for all, let me caution you against alluding to her. I have a particular reason for disliking her father—for hating him, indeed, for my feelings towards him are of the bitterest kind, and I cannot endure to hear of any one connected with him."

"Well, sir, your wishes shall be obeyed, so far as it is in my power to obey them," replied Randulph; "but I should not be dealing frankly with you, if I did not tell you that I think them a little unreasonable. I can easily understand that Mr. Scarve may have offended you, but his daughter——"

"Randulph," cried Abel, fixing his grey eye upon him, "you are in love with that girl, or rather, you fancy yourself so; for love, though sown at once, requires time to bring it to maturity. You must subdue this passion, if you entertain it. The daughter of such a man must inherit some of his bad qualities."

"There I think you are unjust, sir," rejoined Randulph. "And, grant that the father may be objectionable, the mother, whom she evidently takes after, may have been——"

"Randulph!" exclaimed Abel, interrupting him with a sharp cry, "would you drive me mad?"

"What have I said, sir?" asked the young man, in astonishment.

"For Heaven's sake, hold your tongue!" whispered uncle Trussell, who had in vain been endeavouring to attract his nephew's attention. "Don't you see he can't bear to talk of these Scarves?"

Randulph was greatly disconcerted. In vain he tried to rally; no subject for conversation occurred to him; but at last uncle Trussell came to his relief.

"We are going to breakfast with Beau Villiers to-morrow morning, sir," he said to his brother. "We were asked to Lady Fazakerly's drum to-night; and Lady Brabazon invited us to accompany her to Ranelagh."

"And why didn't you go?" asked Abel, peevishly.

"Because, sir, I thought it might not be agreeable to you," returned Trussell.

"Pshaw! what care I about it!" rejoined Abel. "Plunge your charge over head and ears in dissipation! Surfeit him, as the grocers do their apprentices with sweets! Never mind me in future. Do what you will."

Uncle Trussell winked at Randulph.

"We'll take him at his word," he whispered.

But Randulph took no notice of the signal. His heart was too fully occupied with Hilda Scarve; and he felt a rising dislike to uncle Abel which he could not conquer. Excusing himself from taking more wine, he repaired to the Garden, and entered the summer-house, where he gazed at the broad and beautiful river flowing past it, and the venerable Abbey on the opposite shore, near which she dwelt whom he now began to acknowledge was mistress of his heart.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MISER AND JACOB—A THIRD NEPHEW—A DINNER AT THE MISER'S—HILDA'S OPINION OF HER COUSIN.

Nothing very particular occurred at the miser's dwelling after Randulph's departure. Mr. Scarve took a large account-book from the box beneath his table, together with several papers, from which he proceeded to make extracts; and he thus employed himself for more than an hour and a half, when, his farthing candle having burnt down into the socket, he intimated to his daughter and Mrs. Clinton that it was time to retire to rest.

"You have sat up longer than usual," he said, "and I have been so busy that I quite forgot to bid you to go to bed. Hilda, your cousin, Philip Frewin, will dine here to-morrow."

"You have told me that before, sir," she replied, coldly.

"And I have told you also, that it is my wish you should receive him graciously," rejoined the miser. "Don't say a word more on the subject. Good night, daughter—good night, sister Clinton. Here, Jacob, light the ladies up stairs! I have settled my accounts, and don't want the candle."

Jacob obeyed, and the ladies were conducted to their room, to retire to rest, as usual, in the dark.

A moment afterwards, Jacob returned, and set the expiring candle on the table.

"Well, Jacob," said the miser to him, "what did you think of our visitor to-day?"

"What did *you* think of him, sir?" returned Jacob, evasively.

"Pretty well," replied Mr. Scarve. "Not wanting in good looks—but improvident—thoughtless in the extreme."

"Don't think so," rejoined Jacob, gruffly.

"You're no judge of character," rejoined the miser, sharply. "I read the spendthrift in his whole appearance and demeanour. In short, Jacob, I would rather see no more of him. If he *should* call again, which is not unlikely, though I gave him a broad enough hint that his visits would be anything but agreeable, you will deny me and my daughter to him."

"What!" exclaimed Jacob, "do you mean to shut your doors against the son of your old friend? Is that acting like a gentleman, let alone a Christian?"

"The lad is a scrapegrace, Jacob—a senseless, romantic scrapegrace," rejoined the miser.

"Don't think so," replied Jacob

"He has given away his fortune," said the miser.

"He'll get it back in time," was the rejoinder.

"Jacob, you're a fool!" said the miser.

"Fool or not," replied Jacob, "if I were you, I would marry my daughter to that young man."

"When I ask your advice on the subject, it will be time enough to offer it," rejoined the miser. "You may now retire, Jacob. But first go over the house and see that all's safe. I thought I heard a noise in the cellar last night."

"It was the rats, sir," replied Jacob.

"Indeed!" replied the miser; "then the rats make a pretty chattering with their jaws. Jacob, I suspect it was you."

"Well, then, it *was* me," replied Jacob, doggedly.

"Oh! you confess it?" replied the miser, uneasily. "Where do you get your victuals from? Who supplies you with them, eh?"

"Never you mind, sir," replied Jocob; "so as it doesn't cost you anythin', you needn't care."

"True, true!" said the miser; "and yet I should like to know how you get your food."

"I don't steal it," replied Jacob. "But see, the candle's goin' out—you had better go to bed."

"You're right, Jacob," said the old man. "Good night! Be sure you look to the house."

With this he crept off to his own chamber, and, just as he reached it, the candle expired.

Mr. Scarve always arose at daybreak, and generally spent two or three hours before breakfast at his accounts. On the morning following the events previously related, he remained longer than usual in his own room, and when summoned to breakfast by Mrs. Clinton at nine o'clock, he descended with a large deed under his arm. The family breakfast consisted of milk and water, the proportions being one-third of the former liquid to two of the latter—a small loaf of bread, but neither butter nor meat. Of this meagre fare all parties partook sparingly, and the meal was soon ended. Hilda had generally little appetite, but on this occasion she ate less than usual, and her father remarked it.

"I fear you are not well to-day," he said; "I am sorry for it, for I wished you to be in good looks to receive your cousin."

"I have no wish to see him," she replied, with a look of inexpressible disgust.

"Then you have no wish to please me," he rejoined.

The miser made no further remark at the time, but when the scanty remains of breakfast were removed, and he was left alone with his daughter, he said—"Hilda, I want a word with you. I have long desired to converse with you on a subject nearest my heart. It relates to your cousin, Philip Frewin. You can scarcely be ignorant that he seeks your hand. But if you are ignorant of his intentions, I must now acquaint you with them. I have a very high opinion of him, not merely because he is my nephew, but because he is a very prudent, careful person, and will take care of what he has got. He is directly the reverse of the weak young man who was here last night."

"So he appears, sir," replied Hilda, significantly.

"Philip is very rich, Hilda," pursued the miser; "he is worth fifty thousand pounds, if he is worth a penny. And, in short, it is my pleasure, if he *should* propose to you, as I expect he will, that you accept him."

"Then it is fit, dear father, that you should know what my answer will be to his proposal," she replied.

"What will it be?" asked the miser.

"A positive and decided refusal," she returned.

"Hilda!" exclaimed the miser, furiously—"Hilda!"

"Do not urge me further, father," she rejoined, calmly; "upon this point I am firm."

"You are captivated by the fair face and showy figure of the prodigal who was here last night," cried Mr. Scarve, carried away by his passion; "but mark me, I will never consent to such a match. If you wed him, neither he nor you, nor any child or children of yours, shall ever have a penny of mine!—" I'll disinherit you all! He is a beggar, and a beggar's wife you shall be. If the fool had but kept fast hold of the estates, all might have been well—I might have consented; but as it is, I will never listen to his suit. No, Hilda," he continued, moderating himself, "the husband for you is Philip Frewin, my sister's son —one who knows the value of money, and will take care of it,— one who hates extravagance in all ways. I can commend him as a thoroughly well principled, well-conducted young man."

"He may be all you describe,—though I doubt it," she replied; "but I do not desire to marry."

"Tush!" rejoined the miser, impatiently—"every woman desires to marry. It is her first object—what she is brought up for—the end and aim of her existence."

"But surely, father," replied Hilda, with a half smile, "every woman desires to marry the man she loves. Her heart must have something to do with her choice."

"Pshaw!" cried the miser, "mere idle talk,—mere girl's fancy. Before you have been married a week, you will love your husband better than any man in the world. A husband should not be chosen for his good looks, but for his good qualities; for his pecuniary, rather than his personal advantages; and for his ability to take care of you, your property, and your children. Such a one is Philip Frewin—such a one is *not* Randulph Crew."

"I wish you would not mention Randulph Crew so often, father," replied Hilda, in some little confusion; "I do not understand why his name should be brought forward."

"Nor I," rejoined the miser; "and I'll take care not to mention it again. But enough has been said on the subject. You know my wishes; don't dispute them. Go to your chamber, child; go to your chamber!" And he turned away from her to pore over the deed before him. Hilda gazed at him for a moment, irresolutely, and then sighing deeply, withdrew.

A guest being expected to dinner, some little preparation was made. The repast was to consist of a few ribs of beef baked upon half-a-dozen potatoes, followed by a small batter pudding, likewise baked.

Punctually at two o'clock, at which hour the miser dined, a knock was heard at the door, and Jacob, answering the summons, admitted a tall, thin young man, with very sharp features, dressed in an old worn-out grey cloth coat, with plated metal buttons, that might have belonged to his grandfather; a tattered plush waistcoat; darned worsted hose; a scratch wig, looking as if it had been picked up in the kennel; and old shoes, with high quarters fastened by small iron buckles. This extraordinary personage was welcomed with great cordiality by his uncle, who seemed to contemplate his miserable appearance with the utmost satisfaction.

Hilda, however, would scarcely behave civilly to him, though the young man paid her great attention, and whenever her father's back was turned, put on a manner that filled her with disgust. At the close of dinner, the miser called for wine, and a bottle was brought him, containing barely a glass, as was proved when Jacob poured it out. Mr. Scarve pressed his nephew to take it, but the young man declined. The miser then raised the glass to his lips, but put it down untasted, observing—"No, I don't require it—indeed, I am better without it. Put it back again, Jacob. I drink your health, nephew, in a glass of water."

"And I return the pledge in the same wholesome beverage," returned Philip Frewin. "I never take any other, sir," he added, ogling Hilda in an intolerable manner. "I drink to you, fair cousin," and as he spoke he gulped down a large draught, but with a very bad grace.

"I don't think for all he says that he's accustomed to such draughts," thought Jacob. "He doesn't look like a water-drinker."

Dinner was no sooner over than Hilda withdrew with her aunt to her own room; nor would she, though her father sent Jacob to summon her, return.

"Girls have strange fancies, Philip," he said to his nephew "Her mother was just as whimsical. I don't think, though she married me, that she cared for me."

"Since I have your consent to the match, sir, that is all I care for," replied Philip. "Love will come in good time. My cousin Hilda is a charming girl, and would be a prize without a penny, but with what you propose to give her—"

"To leave her, Philip—to leave her—not to give her!" interrupted the miser, hastily. "I shall give her nothing during my lifetime."

"Not make any settlement?" asked Philip, uneasily

"None whatever," replied the miser; "but I shall require a settlement on your part. You are rich, Philip, and can make a good settlement."

"No settlement on your part, uncle!" muttered Frewin, "and a large one demanded on mine! This requires consideration."

"No, it doesn't," said the miser, sharply; "for if you hesitate, you sha'n't have her. My daughter shall not be refused by any man, even by my sister's son. You shall take her on my terms, or not at all."

"I will gladly take her so, uncle," replied Philip.

"You will do wisely," rejoined the miser, more calmly. "And now I have good news for you, Phil—rare news! You know—for our attorney, Diggs, will have told you—that I have advanced fourteen thousand pounds to Sir Bulkeley Price on the mortgage of one of his estates in Flintshire. Now, the estate is worth upwards of twenty thousand pounds—perhaps more, because there are several copper mines upon it. Well, I have given Sir Bulkeley notice to pay over the money. He has paid no attention to the application; and if I do not receive the money at six o'clock, at which hour it must be paid or tendered, I shall foreclose—yes, foreclose, nephew—and the estates will become mine—your wife's hereafter, and your children's."

"And *mine*," thought Philip. "I sincerely congratulate you, uncle," he added, aloud, "and hope nothing may happen to deprive you of your rights."

"Nothing is likely to happen now, Philip," replied Mr. Scarve. "The estate is as good as my own—I have just been reading over the description of it in the deed of mortgage—and a noble estate it is. But since Hilda wont come down, it is scarcely worth while for you to stay longer. Come and dine with me this day week, and I will try and fix the day. Meanwhile, I will speak with my daughter, and bring her to her senses."

"I am glad to hear you say so, uncle," rejoined Philip, "for I almost began to fear there might be a rival in the case."

"A rival!—pshaw!" cried the miser, with a slightly embarrassed look. "It is true that Mr. Randulph Crew called here last night;—he is a very handsome young man, and fit to win a girl's heart. But I don't think Hilda heeded him."

"Indeed, sir!" replied Philip, uneasily. "Well, never mind what impression he made—she is mine, if you give her to me."

"And that I do, nephew—on the terms I have mentioned, but no other," rejoined the miser. "Tuesday next, at two. Jacob, show Mr. Frewin to the door. Good bye, nephew—good bye!"

Philip was then ushered forth by Jacob, who eyed him surlily askance, as he conducted him to the door, and shook his hand behind his back as he departed.

"That skinflint shall never marry my young missis," he muttered, "if I can prevent it."

On reaching King-street, Philip Frewin snapped his fingers derisively in the air, and quickening his pace, did not stop till he reached the door of a tavern in the Rhenish Wine-yard, in that street, and entering it, proceeded at once to a private room. Then, bursting into a loud laugh, he dashed his old wig to the ground, and trampled upon it; threw off his tattered coat and waistcoat, and proceeded to rid himself of the rest of his attire. He next equipped himself in a smart suit of green velvet, put on a campaign wig, and added lace ruffles to his shirt.

"I am glad to get rid of those horrid masquerade habiliments," he muttered; "the part is a devilish disagreeable one to act. But no matter—it is worth playing! My fair cousin will like me all the better when she knows my real character. And now I must hasten to Diggs, to tell him how I have prospered, and instruct him how to proceed."

On being informed by Jacob of her obnoxious cousin's departure, Hilda came down stairs with her aunt, and bore her father's reproaches with a meekness that, instead of allaying his fury, served to increase it. At length she ventured to say, "Why do you wish me married, sir? I am quite content as I am, and could not be happier. I think—nay, I am sure—if I quitted you, you would feel very desolate."

"Weigh that over before it's too late," interposed Jacob. "I'm sure *I* should feel very desolate. I don't think I'd stop with you."

"Hold your tongue, sirrah!" cried the miser, sharply. "I can live very well alone, Hilda," he added, turning to her, "and I should like to see you comfortably settled before I die. I don't want you to become the prey of an adventurer."

"If that is all you are afraid of, father, you may rest quite easy," she replied. "And do not suppose I speak from any feeling of prejudice, but I think you are deceived in my cousin."

"Deceived, Hilda! In what way?" asked the miser.

"By his apparent carefulness—by the manner in which he seems to adapt himself to your notions and peculiarities," she replied. "Recollect, too, that, owing to circumstances, you have seen and known so little of him, that, but for the fact of his being your nephew, he might be an entire stranger. Forgive me, sir, if I say you are not acting in this case with your usual caution. You trust too much to Philip's own representations."

"You think so," said the miser—"but you are wrong. I have made inquiries through one who would not deceive me—my attorney, Mr. Diggs—and I am assured that Philip is the most careful person breathing."

"I hope you don't except yourself," muttered Jacob.

"In fact, I hear nothing but good of him from Diggs," pursued the miser, not choosing to notice the remark; "and what is better, I know—for I have seen the will—that his father left him fifty thousand pounds—fifty thousand pounds, Hilda!—twenty of which he shall settle on you."

"Do not suffer this notion to get possession of you, I entreat, dear father," she replied. "If he had a million of money, I would never marry Philip Frewin."

Here Mrs. Clinton, who had in vain endeavoured to throw in a word, interposed, and engaged Hilda in conversation. The miser referred to his mortgage-deed; and the description of the estate, which he looked upon as his own, restored him to good temper.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PAYMENT OF THE MORTGAGE MONEY.

Nearly an hour having elapsed, Mr. Scarve arose, and called to Jacob, who had retired to the cellar. The summons not being answered as expeditiously as he desired, he called again, and Jacob made his appearance, brushing the moisture from his lips, and trying to swallow down a huge morsel that stuck in his throat.

"You have been eating, rascal!" cried the miser, "and drinking, too! Faugh! how the knave smells of beer!"

"If I have been eatin' and drinkin'," said Jacob, clearing his throat by a violent effort, "it hasn't been at your expense."

"Well, go and see what's o'clock," said the miser, who did not appear particularly angry.

"What's o'clock!" exclaimed Jacob, in surprise. "Why, I've lived with you these twenty years, and never was sent on such a message before. What do you want to know what's o'clock for?"

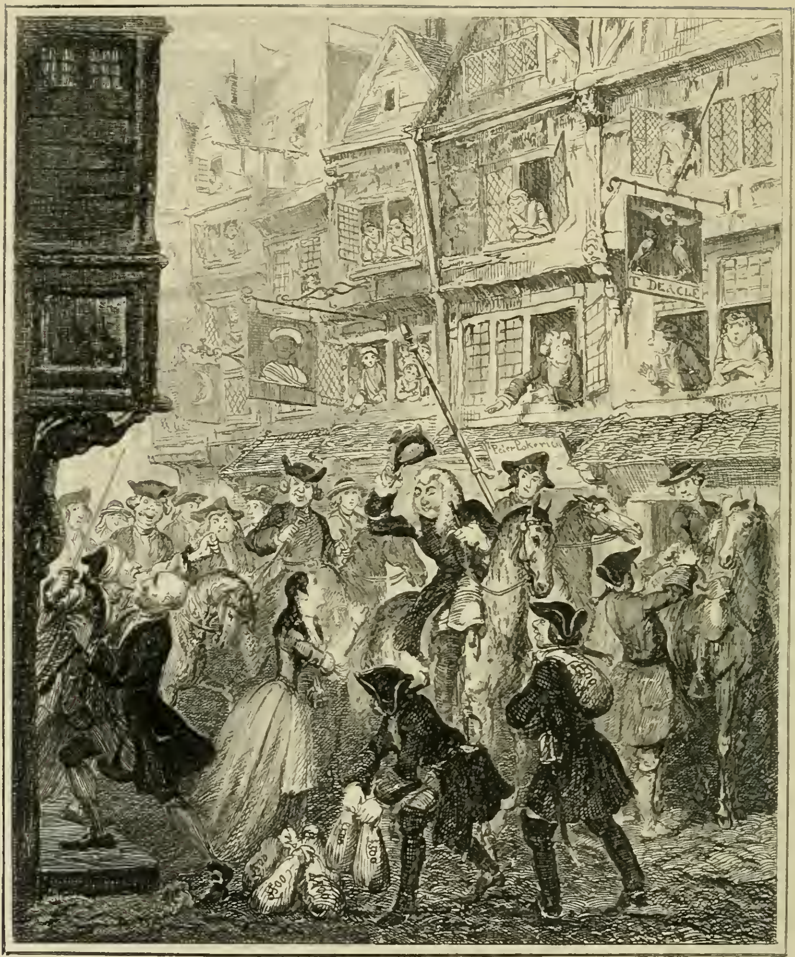
"What's that to you, sirrah?" rejoined the miser, with more anger in his words than in his tones or looks. "But I'll tell you thus much, I never in my life wished a day to be passed so much as I do this!"

"You excite my curiosity, father," said Hilda. "Why do you wish it passed?"

"Because, if a certain sum of money is not paid to me before six o'clock, I shall be the possessor of one of the finest estates in Wales," replied the miser. "It must now be five; in another hour I shall be safe—safe, Hilda!—the mortgage will be foreclosed—the estate mine! Mr. Diggs will be here at six. If I obtain this prize, Jacob, you shall drink my health in the glass of wine I put back in the bottle."

"Then it'll be the first time I ever so drunk it," replied Jacob.

"Take care it isn't the last, you thankless varlet," rejoined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George Cruikshank

the miser. "Don't stand chattering there! Go and see what's o'clock."

As Jacob departed to obey his injunction, Mr. Scarve paced to and fro within the room, rubbing his hands, and chuckling to himself. Five minutes nearly elapsed before Jacob returned; and when he did so, it was with a countenance of very peculiar significance.

"Well, is it five?" cried the miser.

"No; it's fourteen," replied Jacob.

"Fourteen!" exclaimed the miser. "What do you mean? You're drunk, sirrah—drunk on the promise of a glass of wine."

"No, I'm not," replied Jacob. "I mean that there is a troop of fourteen horsemen at the door. There!—don't you hear 'em? They make noise enough, I should think."

And as he spoke, a loud knocking, mixed with shouts and laughter, came sounding down the passage.

"It is the mortgage-money, father," said Hilda.

"It is—damnation!" cried the miser, stamping on the ground.

"At first I took the troop for a gang of highwaymen," said Jacob, "when their leader, a fat, bloated old fellow, calls out to me in an imperious tone, 'Tell your master, the miser,' says he, 'that Sir Bulkeley Price has brought him his money. He is not yet owner of an estate in Flintshire.' And then all his followers burst out a laughin'; and I don't think they've done yet."

"Curses on them!" cried the miser, furiously, "and on him too! They sha'n't enter my dwelling. I wont receive the money. Send them away! Tell them I'm not at home, Jacob!"

"It wont do, sir," replied Jacob; "they know you're at home, for I told 'em so. And as to refusing the money, why should you do that? They have brought it in great bags—bags of gold, of five hundred pounds each."

"Five hundred devils!" cried the miser, foaming with rage. "What! bring such a sum as that in broad day! I shall be exposed to all my prying neighbours."

"That you will," rejoined Jacob; "they're all at the windows looking on. There's Mr. Deacle, the mercer, over the way, and his wife and daughter; and the inquisitive little barber next door; and the ironmonger's wife and her family at the Blackamoor's Head; and the vintner's at the Man-in-the-Moon, and—"

"Hold your peace," cried the miser, furiously, "or I'll strangle you! I'll not be insulted thus by any man! Fetch me my sword!"

"Father!" exclaimed Hilda, "why do you excite yourself thus? Sir Bulkeley Price has but done what was right; he has brought you back your money."

"What is it o'clock, Jacob?—did you ascertain that?" cried the miser.

"Not five, sir,—not five," replied Jacob.

"Oh! perdition seize him! he is in time," cried the miser. "But I'll be revenged. I'll have his blood if I can't have the estate. My sword, Jacob! What! you wont move? Nay, then, I'll fetch it myself." And opening a side-door, he rushed up a small flight of steps leading to his bedroom.

"Some mischief will happen, Jacob," cried Hilda, with a terrified look. "I never saw my father so agitated before. I'll go forth myself, and entreat Sir Bulkeley to depart."

"Don't expose yourself to the insults of his servants, miss," rejoined Jacob. "I did not tell master a quarter what they said of him."

But despite his entreaties, and those of her aunt, who also endeavoured to detain her, she rushed forth, followed by Jacob.

On gaining the street, Hilda found Jacob's statement perfectly correct. A troop of fourteen horsemen, with Sir Bulkeley Price at their head, were drawn up in front of the house. Most of them were well mounted, though a few of the number rode stout Welch ponies. All had swords at their sides, and pistols in their holsters, as was needful from the amount of money they carried; every man having been provided with two bags, each containing five hundred pounds in gold, slung over his saddle-bow. A pile of these precious sacks lay at the door, and some of the men were now adding to the heap, while others were unslinging bags from their comrades' saddles. The whole company were in high glee, and laughing loudly. The leader of the troop, Sir Bulkeley Price, was a stout, portly gentleman, whose swollen inflamed cheeks and mulberry nose showed he was by no means indifferent to the pleasures of the table. A claret-coloured velvet riding-coat, buttoned to the throat, displayed his full chest and rather commanding figure to advantage: while a well-powdered, full-bottomed periwig contrasted strongly with his rubicund and fiery visage. Hilda's appearance created a great sensation among the lookers-on, and especially attracted the attention of the barber, who was chattering with Mr. Deacle about the occurrence, and of the fair Thomasine, who was leaning out of an upper window, just above her father's sign of the Three Pigeons.

"There's Miss Scarve!" cried Peter, calling to Thomasine.

"I see her," replied the mercer's daughter. "Poor thing, how I pity her—to be exposed to such insults! I long to fly to her assistance."

"Do, do!" cried Peter. "I'll fly with you."

"No, don't," said Mr. Deacle; "you had better not interfere. Lord bless me! I wonder what it all means."

Heedless of what was passing around her, for she heard her father's furious voice in the passage, Hilda rushed towards Sir Bulkeley Price, and, in a tone of the most earnest entreaty, cried, "Oh, sir, I implore you to go away! My father is fearfully incensed—some mischief will happen!"

"You are Mr. Scarve's daughter, I presume?" returned Sir Bulkeley, politely taking off his hat. "I should never have suspected him of owning aught so beautiful. But why should I go away, Miss Scarve? I am merely come to pay your father a sum of money which I borrowed from him."

"But it is the manner of paying it, sir,—the public manner,—the exposure that incenses him," cried Hilda. "I would not for twice the amount, that this had happened."

"I dare say not," replied Sir Bulkeley; "but your father has forced me into the measure. My estate would have been forfeited if I had not repaid the money by six o'clock. It is as unpleasant to me as it can be to him; but I had no alternative."

At this moment a loud, angry cry was heard at the door, and the miser appeared, brandishing his drawn sword at it. His mad career was opposed by Jacob, whose wig was knocked off in his endeavours to push him backwards.

"Villain!" cried the miser, shaking his hand at Sir Bulkeley, "villain, you shall repent your insolence! Release me, Jacob! Let me get at him!"

"No, you sh'a'nt!" replied Jacob, who had to exert all his strength, such was the miser's fury, to keep him back.

Mr. Scarve's vociferations of rage were now drowned by the hootings and jeers of the Welch baronet's attendants, who did all in their power to incense him further. Terrified by the cries, Hilda clasped her hands in agony, and again addressed herself to Sir Bulkeley.

"As you are a gentleman, sir, I beseech you to withdraw," she said.

"Such an appeal, and from such lips, is irresistible," replied Sir Bulkeley, again raising his hat.

"He is no gentleman, Hilda!" shrieked her father, who overheard what was said. "Come away, girl, I command you—leave him to me!"

"Well crowed, old cock!" cried one of the attendants, in mockery. And all laughed jeeringly, as before.

"Hold your tongues, you saucy knaves!" cried Jacob, fiercely regarding them; "or as soon as I'm at liberty, I'll break some of your addle pates."

"For pity's sake,—go, go!" cried Hilda to the baronet, "and take the money with you. Another time will do for payment."

"Pardon me, Miss Scarve," replied Sir Bulkeley; "another time will *not* do. I mustn't jeopardize my estate.—Mr. Scarve," he shouted to the miser, "here is your money—fourteen thousand pounds, in gold.—Friends," he added, looking round at the crowd of spectators in the street, and at the windows, "I call you all to witness, that this money is paid before six o'clock. I will take your word, Miss Scarve, for a receipt, and for the delivering up of the mortgage deeds."

"Take hence your money, villain!" vociferated the miser, "I want none of it."

This exclamation was followed by a roar of derisive laughter from the baronet's attendants.

"Silence them—oh, silence them, sir!" cried Hilda, imploringly.

Sir Bulkeley looked majestically round, and his attendants became instantly mute. At the same time, Jacob forced Mr. Scarve into the house; and Hilda, hastily expressing her thanks to the baronet, withdrew. In a few seconds, the whole of the bags of money were collected, and placed on the threshold. Sir Bulkeley would not, however, depart till Jacob returned, when he committed the heap to his custody.

"What have you done with your master?" he asked.

"He has fainted, and his daughter is tending him," replied Jacob.

"Well, take him that restorative," rejoined Sir Bulkeley, pointing to the money-bags; "it will speedily revive him."

So saying, he rode off with his followers, amid the acclamations of the spectators. The same persons next began to hoot Jacob, and even seemed disposed to assail him; but being now provided with his crabstick, he presented such a menacing and formidable appearance, that those nearest him slunk off.

In the hurry of the moment, it has been omitted to mention, that when Hilda retired, the fair Thomasine uttered a scream, and fainted. Made aware of the circumstance, both by the cry and the disappearance of the mercer and his wife from the windows, Peter Pokerich quitted his own dwelling, and flew to render aid. With some little difficulty, the sensitive damsel was brought to herself; but when restored to consciousness, she was very palpitating and hysterical, and leaned against the wall, with her head upon her hand, in the attitude of a tragic heroine.

"Oh, the indignities that that sweet creature has endured!" she gasped. "She is a model of filial piety, and more to be admired than the Grecian Daughter."

"Much more," said Peter, "though I don't recollect the particular attractions of the lady you mention."

"Would I were her friend!" cried the fair Thomasine. "Would I might pour my sorrows into her sympathetic bosom!"

"What hinders you from doing so?" asked the barber.

An hysterical sob was all the fair Thomasine's answer.

"Fourteen thousand pounds!" exclaimed Peter, almost unconsciously. "What a fortune Hilda Scarve will be!"

"She would be a fortune without a farthing," cried the fair Thomasine.

Meantime the crowd dispersed; but not before Jacob had noticed some suspicious-looking personages eyeing the bags of treasure lying at the door in a very alarming manner.

"I shall have to keep strict watch to-night," he thought. "Such a public delivery of money as this is almost an inducement to robbery. We ought to have a couple of watchmen."

Thus ruminating, he removed the whole of the bags, twenty-eight in number, and each containing five hundred pounds, into the passage. He then locked, bolted, and barred the door, and afterwards conveyed the treasure into the room generally used by Mr. Scarve.

The miser, as he had stated to Sir Bulkeley, had fainted. The unhappy man recovered just as Jacob brought in the last two bags, and seeing the treasure before him, uttered a wild shriek, broke from his daughter and sister-in-law, who were tending him, and, throwing himself upon the heap, relapsed into insensibility.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER—THE LANDLORD OF THE ROSE AND CROWN—CORDWELL FIREBRAS.

It will now be necessary, for a short space, to retrace the current of our story. Peter Pokerich, as related in a previous chapter, crossed over to his own house with the letter he had abstracted from Randulph's saddle-bags, and immediately proceeding to examine it, found it was addressed to Mr. Cordwell Firebras, at the Rose and Crown, Gardiner's-street, Petty France. This not tending greatly to enlighten him, he tried to obtain a peep at its contents by pressing down the sides between his finger and thumb; but not being able to make out anything in this way, his curiosity got the master of him, and he broke the seal; but so dexterously and carefully, that he felt confident he could restore the letter to its original appearance if needful. He then read as follows:—

"Friend Cordwell,—The bearer of this letter is just the man you want. He's a bold rider; always in at the death; and as rash and daring as our young squire himself. The game I sent you was seized by the keepers, as perhaps you may have heard; but I'll forward another basket shortly by a safer conveyance. Don't be in a hurry about coming over to us; and tell the young squire we can't promise him much sport this season. The game is plenty, but our kennel is but thinly stocked. The old pack is nearly broken up; Talbot and Ringwood have been 'ticed away by old George's keeper; and we shall do no good unless the great squire on t'other side of the river will send us a strong pack of harriers, of the best French breed. We want some Scotch terriers sadly, for the rats are greatly on the increase. If the young squire can manage this, the sooner he comes the better, but not otherwise. Meanwhile, I again advise you to engage the bearer of this letter.

"Your assured friend,
"NED POYNTON."

This letter was a complete enigma to the barber. He read it over and over again, but could make neither head nor tail of it. He could not help thinking that more was meant than met the eye, but still he could not penetrate the mystery. He determined, however, to call the next morning at the Rose and Crown to make some inquiries after Mr. Cordwell Firebras, whose name had something mysterious and extraordinary about it that piqued his curiosity. And with this intention he retired to rest.

"After all," said Peter, as he laid his head on his pillow, "I shouldn't wonder if that young man turned out a poacher. Now I think of it, he certainly looks like one. Nobody but a poacher would prefer his own hair to a wig."

Sallying forth betimes the next day, he repaired to the Rose and Crown, which was but a short distance from his own dwelling, and inquired of the potboy at the door whether a gentleman of the name of Cordwell Firebras lodged there. The potboy could give him no answer, but, applying to the chamberlain, he was told that Mr. Firebras frequented the house, but did not lodge there.

"He generally comes in the evening," said the man; "and if you have any message to leave for him I will deliver it."

"What sort of a man is he?" inquired the barber.

Before the chamberlain could reply, the landlord made his appearance, and on being informed of the barber's inquiry, asked him what he wanted with Mr. Cordwell Firebras.

"A gentleman who has a letter for him called at my shop last night," said Peter, "and wished me to inquire whether he was still here,—that's all."

"Pray step this way, sir," rejoined the landlord, ushering Peter into an inner room.

Here the landlord took up a chair, and, knocking it three times on the floor, without offering it to his guest, sat down. Not exactly knowing what to make of this singular reception, Peter took up a chair, knocked it in like manner, and sat down opposite the landlord. The landlord then tapped his nose, and Peter, not to be behindhand, imitated the gesture.

"All's right," said the landlord.

"All's right," echoed Peter.

"Where did you leave them?" asked the landlord.

"Leave whom?" asked Peter, in surprise.

The landlord's countenance altered, and he looked very hard at him.

"What wigs do you wear, friend?" he asked.

"On week days a minor bob, and on Sundays or holidays, a bag," replied Peter, in increased astonishment.

"Hark ye, friend," said the landlord, eyeing his guest with some suspicion," "can you tell me where the king is?"

"At Saint James's Palace, I suppose," replied Peter, innocently.

"To be sure!" replied the landlord, laughing, and getting up; "to be sure! Good morning, sir!"

"Stop, stop!" cried Peter, "I didn't come here to answer idle questions. I want to know something about Mr. Cordwell Firebras."

"I know nothing about him, sir," replied the landlord, evasively—"you must apply elsewhere."

Thus baffled, Peter was obliged to return to his own dwelling; and his mind was so fully occupied with Randulph Crew and the mysterious Cordwell Firebras, that he could scarcely attend to his business. About four o'clock, as he was sitting in his shop, combing out a flaxen periwig, Mr. Crackenthorpe Cripps came in, and, flinging himself into a seat, said—"Scatter some pulvilio over me, Pokerich! for the tar and paint of the wherry I have just quitted have quite overcome me."

Having recovered breath, the valet then proceeded to explain the business with which he had been charged by his uncle, and he found a ready agent in the barber, who, however, explained to him the difficulty of obtaining any precise information of what passed in the miser's dwelling. While discussing this matter, it occurred to Peter that Mr. Cripps was a proper person to consult about the mysterious letter. He knew that the valet was a person of no particular scruples, and might be safely confided in. He therefore showed him the letter. Mr. Cripps read it over twice or thrice, and at last said—"Egad, I cannot tell what to make of it, but I'll soon find out the meaning of the riddle. Make it up again, and I'll deliver it myself to Mr. Cordwell Firebras."

"When will you take it?" asked the barber, after he had carefully fastened up the seal.

"At once," replied Mr. Cripps. "I'm in the humour for an adventure. I'll return directly, and report my success."

He accordingly set forth, and encountering an empty chair as he entered the area in front of the Abbey, got into it, and told the bearers to proceed to the Rose and Crown. Arrived there, with all the assurance he could muster, he strutted into the bar, and, flourishing his cane, inquired for Mr. Cordwell Firebras. The landlord stared at him somewhat suspiciously, but returned no answer; and Mr. Cripps, calling to mind the barber's account of his interview, took up a chair, as if accidentally, and struck it thrice on the floor. This operation acted like magic on the landlord. He made a peculiar sign in return, and said—"He is not here now, sir; indeed, he seldom visits us, except in an evening. But you'll find him at his lodgings, in Ship Yard, not a stone's throw from this." And he added in a lower tone, as Mr. Cripps bowed in acknowledgment—"The club meets here, sir."

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Cripps. "What! every night?"

"Every Friday night, at eleven," replied the landlord. "But may I ask you, sir, where the king is?"

"Over the water," rejoined Cripps; and he thought to himself, "A nice Jacobite's nest I've stumbled upon now, i' faith."

"I see it's all right," said the landlord, smiling. And he accompanied the valet to the door, ushered him to his chair, and told the bearers where to take him. Mr. Cripps speedily arrived at his destination, and was deposited at the door of a small and unpretending-looking house. A middle-aged woman of respectable appearance answered his knock, and informed him that Mr. Cordwell Firebras lodged there, but she was not certain whether he was within. Judging from her manner that she only wished to ascertain whether her lodger would receive him, Mr. Cripps thought it better to secure the interview by delivering his credentials. He did so accordingly, and the result was such as he anticipated. She returned in a few minutes, saying that Mr. Firebras *was* at home, and would be happy to see him.

Mustering all his resolution, Mr. Cripps strutted after her, and was ushered into a small room, in which was a middle-aged gentleman, who immediately advanced towards him. Mr. Cripps had sufficient knowledge of the world to see at once that he had a very dangerous person to deal with, and that it behoved him to be careful how he proceeded. Never had he seen such broad shoulders, such muscular legs, and such a burly frame, as were possessed by the individual before him. Mr. Cordwell Firebras was a little below the middle height, and his squareness of figure, aided by a loose coat of dark brown cloth, edged with silver, which reached half way down his legs, made him look almost as broad as long. His features were somewhat coarse, his cheek bones high, his complexion light, and his beard, brows, and eyelashes of a sandy hue. Altogether he had the look of a Scotsman. His chin was large and broad, evincing the utmost determination, mixed with considerable craftiness; his mouth wide, his nose broad and flat, and his eyes of a light grey. He wore a flaxen bob wig, which harmonized well with his light complexion, and carried a broad-bladed sword, evidently intended more for use than ornament. To this not very prepossessing exterior, Mr. Cordwell Firebras added easy, affable, and almost graceful manners. It was quite clear to Mr. Cripps that he was acting upon the instructions of his correspondent, for he received him with the greatest cordiality, shook him by the hand, and motioned him to be seated. It did not escape Mr. Cripps, in the hasty survey he took of the room, that there was a basket-hilted sword in the corner, together with a brace of long barrelled silver-mounted pistols, and a Highland dirk. Nor did he fail to notice that the window opened upon a small garden, skirting Saint James's Park, thus offering a ready means of escape, if required. These things considered, Mr. Cripps did not feel entirely at his ease, and it required all his effrontery to enable him to go through with his part. Whether it was that Cordwell Firebras perceived his uneasiness, or that his quick perception of character detected the imposition attempted to be practised upon him, is immaterial, but his countenance suddenly changed, and the affable, almost courtier-like manner with which he had commenced, gave way to a stern scrutinizing glance and freezing demeanour that made the valet tremble. They were alone, for having ushered Mr. Cripps into the room, the elderly female retired, closing the door after her.

"You are lately from the country, sir, I believe?" asked Firebras.

"Just arrived, sir," replied Mr. Cripps, taking out his snuff-box to hide his confusion—"allow me to offer you a pinch."

Firebras bowed and accepted the offer. A peculiar smile, which the valet did not like, crossed his features.

"I must compliment you upon your air and manner, sir," said Firebras, in a tone of slight irony; "they are anything but rustic. But may I now ask whom I have the honour of addressing?"

"Mr. Randulph Crew!" replied the valet, confidently.

"Randulph Crew!" exclaimed Firebras, almost starting. "What! the son of my old friend, Randulph Crew? Impossible!"

"I am not aware that my father enjoyed the honour of your friendship, sir," replied the valet, who began to fear he had got on ticklish ground, "but my name is Randulph Crew, and so was my father's before me."

Though the day was by no means chilly, there was a small fire burning in the grate. Mr. Cordwell Firebras placed the letter which he held in his hand before it, and certain lines of writing, traced in invisible ink, instantly appeared. These he eagerly scanned.

"It is useless to trifle longer, sir," he cried, turning suddenly upon the valet. "You are an impostor. For what purpose are you come hither? Answer me, or your life shall pay the forfeit of your rashness."

As he spoke, he drew his sword. Mr. Cripps, though greatly alarmed, drew likewise, but his blade was instantly beaten from his grasp by Firebras.

"Raise a cry, and you are a dead man!" pursued the latter, locking the door, and putting the key in his pocket. "Who are you, sirrah?"

"My name is Crackenthorpe Cripps, and I am chief valet to Beau Villiers," returned the other, bowing.

"You are a spy, rascal!" cried Firebras. "You have come on an errand of the danger of which you were ignorant. But you will get nothing for your pains."

"Pardon me, Mr. Firebras," said the valet, who was by no means destitute of courage, or at all events, of the quality next in value to it—self-possession. I *have* gained my object. I have discovered the existence of a Jacobite club, of which you are a member. I have discovered that there is a plot hatching in Cheshire, and can easily find out who is implicated in it; and I have only to give information to a magistrate, and your arrest must follow."

"Well, sir," replied Firebras, calmly—"well, sir?"

"But I have no such intention," continued Mr Cripps; "your secret is safe with me, provided——"

"You are paid for your silence—ha?"

"Precisely, Mr. Firebras. I am not a Jacobite, neither am I an Hanoverian; and I care as little for the Elector as I do for young Perkin. The fact is, you are in my power, sir, and I shall make the most of my position. Buy me, and I will deal with you fairly."

"Hum!" said Firebras, looking fixedly at him; "well, I *will* employ you, and will also make it worth your while to be true to me. Randulph Crew has of course lost this letter. I will not inquire how it came into your hands; but he cannot be aware that it has reached me. My correspondent says he is about to visit his uncle, Mr. Abel Beechcroft, and cautions me against that gentleman."

"And with reason, sir," remarked Mr. Cripps; "I, also, advise you to beware of him. My uncle is Mr. Beechcroft's butler."

"Then, from your connexion, you may materially aid me in my designs upon this young man," said Firebras. "You must take a letter from me to him."

"With pleasure," replied Mr. Cripps; "and it fortunately happens that he is to breakfast with my master to-morrow morning, when I can easily deliver it."

"Good," replied Firebras, "I will prepare it at once."

With this, he sat down to a side table on which writing materials were placed, and with much deliberation penned a despatch, and sealed it. He then opened a secret drawer, and took out five guineas, which he gave to the valet.

"It is perhaps a needless piece of trouble to seal the letter," he observed, significantly; "but you will learn nothing by opening it beyond the fact that I desire an interview with Mr. Crew. I know I can trust you."

"Oh, you may trust to my honour, Mr. Firebras, 'pon rep.!" said the valet, placing his hand upon his breast.

"I trust to the value you place on your own safety, Mr. Cripps," replied Firebras, significantly. "Attempt to play me false, and nothing shall save you from my vengeance! I have secret agents who will find sure means of reaching you."

These words were pronounced in a tone and with a look that impressed Mr. Cripps with a full sense of the speaker's power of executing his threat.

"You need be under no apprehension about me, Mr. Firebras," he said.

"I am under none, fellow!" rejoined the other, laughing scornfully; "or you should never quit this room alive. Come to me to-morrow night, at ten. I may have more work for you."

"Willingly," replied Mr. Cripps.

Firebras then unlocked the door, and let out the valet, who was ushered to his chair by the elderly female. As he took his place within it, having first ordered the bearers to convey him to the spot where they took him up, he muttered to himself—"So the adventure has terminated very satisfactorily. This Randulph Crew seems destined to make my fortune. Everybody pays me to play the spy upon him. That Cordwell Firebras is an awkward customer. He has an eye that looks through one, and seems to penetrate one's very soul. It wont do to play cross with him. But I must trump up some story to delude the little barber. I'll tell him that nothing is to be made of it—put him off in some way."

Thus musing, he was conveyed to the entrance of the Little Sanctuary, where he alighted, discharged the chair, and bent his steps towards Peter Pokerich's shop, with the full determination of putting his design into execution.

CHAPTER IX.

THE STRANGER AT THE BARBER'S.

NOTWITHSTANDING his engagement to Beau Villiers, Randulph, accustomed to early hours, and blessed, moreover, with a very healthy appetite, needed no urging on the part of Mr. Jukes to sit down at eight o'clock, on the second morning after his arrival in town, to a sort of preliminary breakfast with uncle Abel. Glad of the excuse for a little extra indulgence in repose, Trussell did not rise till late, and Randulph was therefore left to a *tête-à-tête* with his elder uncle. Whether it was that Abel was in a better humour than before, or that he was not fretted by Trussell, whose remarks, however well meant, generally tended to excite his cynical propensities, Randulph could not tell, but he certainly found him more agreeable than he had previously thought him. Abel questioned his nephew narrowly as to his tastes and pursuits, and seemed pleased with the answers he received. In fact, things went on so prosperously, that Mr. Jukes, who was carving a fine Westphalia ham at the well-spread side-board, suspended his operations to rub his hands with delight. Abel noticed his exhilaration, and guessing the cause, could not refrain from smiling, and Randulph thought he had never seen so pleasant a smile before. Abel's heart, indeed, it was evident, was warming towards his nephew; and he made no attempt to check the kindly feeling. He descanted with much force and truth on the dangers to which a young man must be exposed on his first entrance into the world, but exhibited far less straitlacedness than might have been expected. He advised his nephew to mix with society, but not to become a part of it; to use, but not abuse, the advantages nature had given him; and to push his fortune to the utmost; displaying throughout the whole discourse a shrewdness of observation, a nice perception of character, and a knowledge of the world, for which Randulph had not given him credit, and which raised him materially in his opinion. On one point only the young man thought him guilty of injustice—namely, in the bitter and disparaging view he took of women. On this head, therefore, he ventured to differ with him, and his zeal and earnestness appeared to interest Abel. When he had done, the old man shrugged his shoulders, and contented himself with saying, "You'll think differently one day."

Randulph would have replied, but a plate of ham, accompanied by a significant look from the discreet butler, warned him not to pursue the subject further. Accordingly, he was silent, and Abel returned to his exposition and dissection of society with the same earnestness as before.

" About half-past ten Trussell made his appearance. He was dressed with unusual care; had a world of the finest lace at his wrists and on his breast; and wore a green velvet coat, richly embroidered, a satin waistcoat of the same colour, woven with gold, and diamond buckles at his knees, as well as on his shoes. The only part of his attire which appeared to be neglected was his peruke, and this did not escape Abel's attention, as he scanned him contemptuously from head to foot.

"It's all very well," he said, drily; "you are sufficiently be-laced and be-scented to fit you for the beau's society; but your wig is out of order."

"Why you don't surely think I am going in this old peruke, sir?" rejoined Trussell, smiling. "No, no! I'm not quite so careless. I've sent my best periwig to be dressed by Peter Pokerich, the barber in the Little Sanctuary, and mean to put it on as we pass on our way to Spring Gardens, where, as you know, Mr Villiers resides."

"A barber in the Little Sanctuary!" cried Randulph; "why he must be the very person I met when—"

Here a stern look from uncle Abel stopped him, and called the colour to his cheeks.

"Why did you send it there?" remarked Abel, angrily, to his brother. "Was there no other barber near at hand?"

"Oh yes, sir, plenty," replied Trussell; "but Pokerich understands the mode, and I desired to appear to advantage on this occasion. I wish I could induce you to adopt the present fashion, Randulph. Your own hair is certainly very fine, but a periwig would be far more becoming."

"Be natural as long as you can, and keep your own hair, Randulph," said Abel.

"I intend to do so, sir," replied the young man.

"But at all events, your dress must be improved," pursued Trussell. "I will introduce you to M. Desmartins, the French tailor, in Piccadilly. He will make you quite another thing."

"And empty your purse at the same time," sneered Abel. "Wear out the dress you have on. It's almost new."

"It is *quite* new," said Randulph, a little abashed. "It was made expressly for my visit to town, by Stracey, of Chester, who works for all the best people in the county."

"Stracey, of Chester—ha! ha!" exclaimed Uncle Trussell, jeeringly. You had better put by Mr. Stracey for your return. But it is time we started. I must stop a few minutes at Pokerich's."

They then set forth, and it was with a throbbing heart that the young man again found himself beside the dwelling of the miser's daughter. He gazed eagerly at it, in the hope of catching a glimpse of Hilda, but could discern nothing through the barred and dust-begrimed windows.

"May I ask what is the cause of Uncle Abel's aversion to Mr. Scarve?" he inquired of Trussell.

"I would rather not be questioned on that subject," replied the other, "because I am quite sure, if I told you, Abel would discover, from your manner, that I had disclosed his secret. By-the-by," he added, "is Hilda Scarve really a fine girl?"

Randulph returned a rapturous affirmative.

"Egad, then," pursued Trussell, as if debating some matter with himself, "I don't know whether one speculation would not be as good as t'other!"

"What do you mean, uncle?" inquired Randulph.

"Why, that a marriage with Hilda Scarve might answer as well as waiting for Abel's money," replied Trussell; "the miser must be immensely rich—immensely! I'll call on him one of these days, and sound him on the subject of the union."

"Recollect your brother's injunctions, sir!" rejoined Randulph, who was, however, so enchanted by the proposition, that he could have flung his arms round his uncle's neck, and hugged him—"it may be hazardous."

"Tut—tut!" exclaimed Trussell, "he'll never hear of it. They have no sort of communication. Abel hates him like the devil—as well he may. But I must not say more. And here we are at Pokerich's."

With this he entered Peter's shop. The little barber was engaged at the moment in shaving a customer, and called to his apprentice to set chairs for the new comers. He did not at first notice Randulph, who was behind his uncle; but when the young man came into full view, his hand trembled so much that the razor slipped, inflicting a slight wound on the chin of the gentleman he was shaving.

"Have a care, fellow!" cried this person, angrily; "you have cut me."

"Ten thousand pardons, sir," apologized Peter; "it is not much, sir—a mere trifle—a little sticking-plaster will set all to rights."

So saying he very dexterously wiped off the lather, and bathing the gentleman's cheek with warm water, speedily succeeded in stanching the blood. He then finished shaving him, and taking a light flaxen wig from a block hard by, fitted it on his head. This done, the gentleman arose, walked towards a glass, to ascertain the extent of the injury he had received, and finding it very trifling laughed good humouredly. He was a middle-sized man, remarkably squarely and powerfully built; and as the barber assisted him to put on his coat, and fasten on his sword, Randulph could not help noticing his great apparent strength of frame.

"You have not a very steady hand, friend," remarked the stranger, as he took out his purse to pay the barber.

"I never made such a mistake before, sir," replied Peter, "never, on my honour."

"Then I suppose it was this young gentleman who startled you," replied the other, laughing, "for the accident occurred just as he entered your shop."

"Why, really, I was rather surprised to see him, I must own," returned Peter. "Mr. Randulph Crew, your most obedient."

"What!" cried the stranger, with a look of astonishment. "Is that Mr. Randulph Crew?"

It was now Randulph's turn to appear surprised.

"You will wonder at my exclamation, sir," pursued the stranger, advancing towards him; "but I knew a gentleman of your name, which is not a very common one, in Cheshire, years ago—knew him intimately."

"Probably, my father," said Randulph.

"He is well, I hope?" asked the other.

"Alas, sir, I lost him a year ago," replied Randulph.

Here the conversation dropped, for the stranger seemed a little embarrassed, as if he had something to say, and yet did not know how to set about it. He glanced at Trussell, who had taken his seat, and was submitting his bald pate to Peter, while the latter was adjusting upon it, with the utmost care, a very well-powdered peruke.

"Is that a relative of yours?" asked the stranger of Randulph.

"My uncle, sir," replied the young man.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the stranger. And he again hesitated.

"A very singular person," thought Randulph.

"There," cried Trussell, rising, and looking at himself in the glass; "that'll do—capital—capital!"

"Mr. Scarve lives over the way, barber, I believe?" said the stranger to Peter.

"He does, sir," replied the latter. "That's the house. A very strange affair occurred there yester-evening."

"What might that be?" inquired the stranger.

"Why," replied the barber, "about five o'clock the whole street was alarmed by the arrival of a troop of fourteen horsemen, each with a thousand pounds in a couple of bags at his saddle-bow. Well, sir, these horsemen stopped at the miser's door, and threw down their bags before it; and it turned out to be the payment of the sum of fourteen thousand pounds borrowed from old Starve—beg pardon, Scarve—on mortgage by Sir Bulkeley Price, and which the latter was obliged to pay at a certain time, or his estate would have been foreclosed. It was a near run for Sir Bulkeley: he only just saved his distance. Ah! you should have seen how the old miser raved and swore when he found himself robbed of his prey. But for his daughter's interference, he would certainly have laid violent hands on the knight. Ha! ha!"

Randulph, whose breast was agitated with conflicting feelings, was about to question the barber further as to Hilda's conduct on the occasion, when he was checked by the stranger, who, turning hastily to Peter, said, "This is an unheard of mode of paying mortgage money, and so large a sum, too. Are you sure it was as much as fourteen thousand pounds?"

"As that I have a comb in my hand," replied the barber. "And it was paid in gold, too; I heard the chink of the metal myself. Besides, Sir Bulkeley called upon me, together with the other spectators, to witness the payment."

"You surprise me," exclaimed the stranger: "I must have a word with Mr. Scarve on the subject.—Good morning, gentlemen. Mr. Randulph Crew, we may possibly meet again." And raising his hat he walked across the street, and knocked at the miser's door.

"Who is that strange person," asked Trussell of Peter.

"Haven't the least idea, sir," replied the barber. "He came in here to be shaved; that's all I know of him. Never ask customers' names."

Randulph, meanwhile, ran to the door, to see how the stranger would be received, and was somewhat chagrined to find that Jacob, after reconnoitring him according to custom, and detaining him while he consulted his master, admitted him.

"He will see Hilda," sighed the young man.

"Come, nephew, come!" cried Trussell, impatiently. "We shall be late."

Sorely against his will, Randulph suffered himself to be dragged away, and they proceeded along King-street, in the direction of Spring Gardens.

CHAPTER X.

THE BEAU'S LEVEE—THE BREAKFAST—THE EMBARKATION FOR THE FOLLY.

Beau Villiers' residence looked upon Saint James's Park, and had a small garden attached to it. It was by no means a large house, but exquisitely furnished; the whole of the internal decorations being French, and in the gorgeous taste of Louis the Fourteenth. The visitors were admitted by a couple of powdered lacqueys in rich liveries of scarlet faced with white, and passing a large, snow-white French poodle of a peculiar breed, lying on a rug near the door, traversed a hall crowded with busts, statues, bronzes, and large porcelain jars. A page, in a fanciful costume, who might have played a part in one of Watteau's pictures, met them at the foot of the stairs, and, mounting before them, ushered them along a corridor to the entrance of a chamber, before which stood two grinning Africans, arrayed in Oriental habiliments, and wearing great brass ear-rings, and large muslin turbans adorned with brazen crescents. One of them threw open the door, and the two visitors entered a waiting-room, in which a number of persons were assembled, most of whom being known to Trussell, he very courteously returned their salutations.

"Ah, *mon ami*, Desmartins," he said, to a little bowing and cringing personage, very ill-dressed (as tailors are apt to be), from whose pocket depended a measuring-tape, while he carried a pattern-book under his arm, "how are you? This is my nephew, Desmartins. I have told him he must put himself under your skilful hands."

"Proud to undertake him, Mr. Trusséll,—*enchanté!*" replied the Frenchman. "Your nephew has a very fine figure, *ma foi!* But his dress is not at all à-la-mode. Very clownish—what you call it?—countrified—ha! ha!"

"So I told him, Desmartins," replied Trussell. "We shall look in upon you to-day or to-morrow, and put that to rights."

"Enchanted to see you, Mr. Trussèll, and you, sare," replied the tailor, bowing to Randulph.

"Ah, Mr. Penrose, is that you?" pursued Trussell, turning to a slight, effeminate-looking young man, with a paper box and a casket under his arm. "I suppose you have got a new importation of gloves and perfumes—tuberose, orange, jasmine, essence d'Espagne—eh?"

"I have just invented a new scent, sir," replied the perfumer, "and am come to solicit Mr. Villiers' permission to give it his name."

"And if he grants it, your fortune is made," replied Trussell; "the bouquet à-la-Villiers will carry all before it. Ah, Chipchase," turning to a little fellow, whose stunted figure, velvet cap, boots, and other equipments, left no doubt as to his being a jockey, "what news from Newmarket? Has Lord Haversham won the cup, or Sir John Fagg?"

"Neither, sir," replied the jockey. "Mr. Villiers is the winner."

"Bravo! bravissimo!" cried Trussell, clapping his hands; "that's famous! Why, your news is worth twenty pounds to me, Chipchase. I backed Mr. Villiers against the field, though—I may now say it—without a notion he would win, but merely out of compliment."

"The knowin' 'uns has been taken in this time, that's certain, Mr. Trussell," replied the jockey, with a sly wink. "Sir John thought himself safe, but he now finds he's on the wrong side of the hedge. I hope your honour will allow me the pleasure of drinking your health."

"That I will," returned Trussell, taking out his purse, and giving him a piece of money; "and in a crown bowl of punch, too. Ah, Ned Oglethorpe," he added, passing on to another person in a white flannel jacket, and with an open collar; "how are the rackets? My nephew Randulph, Ned. We will come and play a match at tennis with you one of these days. Let me know when the next main is fought at the cockpit.—Captain Culpepper, your most obedient. Nay, don't walk away, Captain; I'm not going to dun you for the few crowns you lost to me at tricktrack, at the British. Randulph, this is Captain Culpepper, as brave a man as ever drew a sword, or brought off his friend from a street row, or," he added, in a lower tone, "ever revenged a secret quarrel. Egad, at Mr. Villiers' levées one is sure to meet all one's friends. Here, nephew," he added, addressing a lithe, active-looking man, in a close-fitting linen dress, with a couple of foils under his arm, "here is the first master of fence in the world—Mr. Hewitt. You must have a few lessons in carte and tierce from him."

Whilst Randulph was returning the fencing-master's bow, the door of the inner room was opened by Mr. Cripps. On discerning Trussell and his companion, the valet immediately hastened towards them, and entreated them to step in to his master, who, he affirmed, had been expecting them for some time.

The apartment into which they were ushered was the beau's dressing-chamber,—that part of it, however, devoted to the toilette-table and its appliances being separated from the rest by a magnificent Indian japanned screen. It was furnished with the most refined and luxurious taste. Rose-coloured curtains drawn across the windows subdued the light, and threw a warm tint on all around, while the air was loaded with delicious perfumes. A very diminutive monkey, clothed in a scarlet coat, and wearing a bag-wig and a little sword, played its diverting tricks in one corner, while a gaudily plumaged macaw screamed in the opposite angle. Choice flowers in pots added their fragrance to the artificial odours, and a couple of exquisite little spaniels of Charles the Second's breed, with the longest and silkliest ears imaginable, and large, gazelle-like eyes, occupied a cushion on the hearth. At a table, covered with the whitest and finest linen, and glittering with silver of the rarest workmanship, together with a superb service of china, sat, or rather reclined, in the easiest of easy chairs, Beau Villiers. He did not rise on the appearance of his guests; but moving slightly, and graciously, to them, though with somewhat, Randulph fancied, of a patronizing air, motioned Mr. Cripps to set them chairs. He was quite in dishabille; his graceful figure being enveloped in a loose dressing-robe of the richest brocade, while the place of a peruke was supplied by a green silk cap, very becomingly put on. His shirt was open at the throat, and decorated with a profusion of lace at the bosom and wrists. Pink silk hose and velvet slippers completed his costume. There were two other persons present; Sir Singleton Spinke, and a very portly gentleman with puffed-out, inflamed cheeks, who was introduced as Sir Bulkeley Price, and whom Randulph concluded must be the hero of the story he had just heard related by the barber—a circumstance which gave him a peculiar interest in his eyes. Meanwhile, Mr. Cripps, who, together with the page, officiated at breakfast, proceeded to do the honours, and twirling the mill of a richly-chased silver chocolate-pot, poured out two well frothed cups of the unctuous beverage, and handed them to the new comers.

A small modicum of a Strasbourg pâté, washed down by a cup of green tea and a glass of claret, constituted the beau's breakfast. Sir Singleton Spinke took chocolate, picked the wing of a chicken, and wound himself up with a glass of usquebaugh. Ample justice was done to the cutlets, the broils, and various other dishes with which the covers were filled, by Sir Bulkeley Price; nor did Trussell or Randulph come far behind him, notwithstanding the preliminary breakfast of the latter. Just before the introduction of the usquebaugh, Sir Bulkeley, after looking round and coughing significantly, said, in a low tone, to the chief valet, "I suppose, Mr. Cripps, there is no ale in the house?"

"No what! Sir Bulkeley?" rejoined Mr. Cripps, staring as if he could not possibly imagine he had heard aright.

"Ale, rascal—ale!" replied the knight, emphatically, and rather angrily.

"No, Sir Bulkeley," replied Mr. Cripps, bowing; "there is no ale, but there is toasted cheese, if that will serve your turn."

Angry as he was, the knight could not help laughing at the valet's impertinence; and a glass of usquebaugh, in which he pledged the old beau, entirely appeased him. The conversation during the meal was lively enough, and was chiefly maintained by the beau and Trussell, their discourse running upon all sorts of fashionable topics, scandal, women, play, and public amusements; in which, as he knew so little about the matters discussed, Randulph took no great interest. His attention, however, was instantly aroused, when Trussell, turning laughingly to Sir Bulkeley, told him he had heard of his "new way of paying old debts."

"I mentioned the matter to Villiers before your arrival," returned Sir Bulkeley; "and it diverted him as much as it appears to divert you. Egad! we had to ride hard though. Several of my tradesmen met me at Highgate, and offered to escort me through the town, but I declined the attention, being of opinion that we were a sufficiently large party without them. You should have seen how the folks stared as we rode along the streets."

"I don't wonder at it," replied Trussell, laughing: "I am almost surprised the train-bands were not sent after you."

"The cream of the adventure was, as usual, the close," pursued the knight. "Never was fury equal to that displayed by the miser at his disappointment. I declare I almost pitied him. His daughter is a charming girl—beautiful as an angel, and rich—nay, i'faith, it is impossible to say how rich she must be. Villiers, you ought to take her off her father's hands."

"I'll think of it," replied the beau, carelessly; "for I am desperately in want of money. Like yourself, I have had some dealings with old Scarve, and know him to be as great an extortioner as Shylock or Sir Giles Overreach. I don't think, however, I could marry his daughter, if she had the wealth of the Indies."

"But you have never seen her, or you would alter your opinion," replied Sir Bulkeley. "She is the most beautiful creature I have beheld for this many a day."

"You pique my curiosity," rejoined the beau. "I must see this paragon of perfection. A propos of beauty," he added to Randulph, who could scarcely hide his uneasiness; "don't you think Clementina Brabazon a fine girl, Mr. Crew?'

"Remarkably so," replied the young man, distractedly.

"She is nothing to what her mother was," observed Sir Singleton. "Twenty years ago, Lady Brabazon, then Miss Norbroke, was, with one exception, the loveliest creature in existence."

"And who might be the exception?" inquired Trussell.

"I am glad you have asked me," replied Sir Singleton; "because it is a gratification to me to tell you it was your sister Sophia,—the mother of this young gentleman. Delicious creature, that she was! She quite won my heart, Mr. Crew; and if she had not been insensible to my suit, I might have had the honour of being your father."

"The supposition is highly flattering," replied Randulph, smiling.

"It makes one melancholy to think of the beauties of by-gone days," continued the old beau, sentimentally, consoling himself at the same time with a pinch of snuff. "Not having seen the miser's daughter, I cannot speak to her attractions; but Sir Bulkeley is a good judge, and his opinion may be relied on. To my taste, the prettiest woman of her day is Kitty Conway, the actress at the little theatre in the Haymarket."

"Kitty is certainly a vastly pretty creature," rejoined Trussell; "but you need scarcely sigh in vain there, Sir Singleton."

And thus they rattled on, till the beau, rising, said—"Mr. Cripps, tell Antoine I shall now make my toilette. How shall we spend the morning, gentlemen? At the cock-pit, the Groom Porter's, the Cocoa tree, or White's?"

"If you desire something new, sir," observed Mr. Cripps, who lingered for a moment, "there is a grand musical entertainment this morning at the Folly on the Thames. I think you would be much diverted by going thither, 'pon rep!"

"A good suggestion!" cried the beau. "I have often rowed past the Folly, but never have been inside it."

"Then don't neglect the present opportunity," said Sir Singleton. "It used to be a pleasant place, when we were young fellows, Trussell. Many a fine woman we have seen there, eh?"

"Many a one—many a one—Sir Singleton," replied the other; "and made love to them too. I shall be glad to see the place again."

"The Folly be it, then!" cried the beau; "and some folks would say it was a proper place for us. Excuse me for a few moments, gentlemen. I will dress as rapidly as possible." So saying, he retired behind the screen, which was drawn still further across the room. Not feeling much interest in the conversation which ensued after the beau's withdrawal, Randulph arose to look at some exquisite miniatures and other articles of *vertu* scattered about the room, and was engaged in examining a magnificent snuff-box, when Mr. Cripps, who had returned from attending his master, came up to him, and said in a low tone, "I am charged with a letter for you, sir. Here it is."

Randulph was prevented from making any remark by the significant looks of the valet, who, giving him to understand by sundry winks and slight gestures, that his uncle was to know nothing of the matter, glided away. Glancing at the group near the table, the young man perceived that Trussell's back was towards him, and that he was, moreover, occupied in recounting some jest to the others. He therefore moved nearer the window, broke the seal of the note, and read as follows:—

"YOUNG MAN,—The letter committed to your charge by your mother, and which was of the last importance, though you appear to have attached so little to it, has fortunately reached its destination. Otherwise, the consequences might have been serious. It is necessary I should have an interview with you, and that without delay. I shall be in the south ambulatory of the cloisters of Westminster Abbey at six o'clock to-morrow, and shall expect you. Fail not in the appointment, as you regard your own safety and that of your mother. Not a word of this to your uncle, or to any one. The slightest imprudence will place you in jeopardy. "CORDWELL FIREBRAS."

"Cordwell Firebras!" exclaimed Randulph, to himself. "Ay, now I remember, that was the name of the person to whom the missing letter was addressed. The whole affair is most mysterious; and the language of this note strange, and even alarming. I'll question Mr. Cripps about it. But hold! I am desired not to mention the matter to my uncles, or to any one. Why should I observe the caution? And yet prudence tells me I had better do so. The note is dated yesterday. A few hours, therefore, will solve the riddle. I *will* keep the appointment."

As he uttered the last words, almost unconsciously, aloud, and with some emphasis, he was startled by hearing a loud laugh behind him, and, turning at the sound, perceived Trussell's round face peeping over his shoulder. He instantly crushed the letter between his fingers.

"Nay, you had better let me see it," laughed Trussell; "I overheard your exclamation. What fair dame has fallen in love with you, eh? Not the miser's daughter, surely? And yet she is almost the only woman you can have seen. But I wont ask impertinent questions, or make impertinent remarks. I see they annoy you. You are right to keep the secret, as well as the appointment. Ha! ha!"

"You are mistaken, uncle!" cried Randulph, hastily; "my appointment is with ——," and checked himself.

"Poh, poh! boy, no excuses with me," interrupted Trussell. "Keep your own counsel. Fortunate dog! I was as lucky myself when I was as young. Ha! ha! But," he added, with a look of some perplexity, "what Mercury brought you the billet?"

"I did, sir," interposed Mr. Cripps, who, having observed what was going forward, flew to the rescue. "I was intrusted with it—by a lady, ahem! Your nephew makes his way rapidly, Mr. Trussell, 'pon rep!"

"So it appears," rejoined Trussell, laughing louder than ever. "Myself over again—ha! ha!"

Randulph was about to contradict the valet's assertion, and set his uncle right as far as he was able, but at this moment the screen was drawn aside, and discovered the beau fully dressed. He was habited in a coat of the finest scarlet cloth, richly embroidered with gold lace, a white waistcoat of the richest silk, flowered with gold in a large pattern, a point lace cravat, and a full-flowing flaxen periwig. On seeing his master, Mr. Cripps hastened to fetch his feathered hat and clouded cane, while the page brought him his gloves. Antoine, the French servant who had assisted him to dress, then advanced with his handkerchief, which was of the finest cambric, edged with lace, and on which he poured a perfume from a scent bottle; while a fourth attendant handed him his snuff-box.

"And now, gentlemen, I am at your service," said the beau, carefully adjusting his hat. "Mr. Cripps, you will attend us. We may need you at the Folly."

The favourite valet bowed, and opened the door of the antechamber. Mr. Villiers paused for a moment to exchange a few words with the assemblage,—applauding the jockey for his success,—announcing to the perfumer that he had just tried his scent, and would accord him permission to put his name to it,—commanding a court suit from the tailor,—and nodding to Ned Oglethorpe, Captain Culpepper, and the fencing-master. He then passed forth with his friends.

The party first took a turn on the Mall. The morning being extremely fine, the walks were filled with a gay throng, as on the preceding day. Wherever they went, Beau Villiers drew all eyes upon him, and to Randulph's amusement, and Trussell's delight, they were followed by a crowd of curious gazers. Among these, Randulph noticed the stranger whom he had met at the barber's shop; but the latter did not seem to court his observation, and he soon afterwards lost sight of him.

Having sauntered as far as Buckingham House, the party retraced their steps, and quitting the park, repaired to the cockpit at Whitehall. Here Sir Bulkeley Price quitted them, having first engaged Randulph and his uncle to dine with him at his house in Saint James's Square on the following day. A quarter of an hour was next whiled away at the Cockpit, after which they proceeded to the Groom-porter's, whose rooms closely adjoined it, where even at that hour they found high play going forward. Beau Villiers, who was a desperate gamester, and seldom liked to miss an opportunity, approached the table where they were playing hazard, and in a short space of time came off the winner of a hundred pounds. Elated with his success, and in high good humour, he left the rooms, and repaired with his companions to Whitehall Stairs, where Mr. Cripps called a boat, in which they all embarked for the Folly.

Randulph had detected the stranger among the crowd of lookers-on at the Groom-porter's, and their boat had not got many yards from shore, when he observed him descend the stairs, and get into another wherry, with the intention, as it appeared from his gestures, of following them.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MISER'S CONSULTATION WITH HIS ATTORNEY—JACOB ALARMED BY HIS MASTER'S APPEARANCE AT NIGHT—THE VISIT OF CORDWELL FIREBRAS.

By the combined attentions of his daughter and sister-in-law, the miser, after a little while, was restored to sensibility, and placed in his chair, where the glass of wine he had destined for Jacob being administered to him, mixed with hot water, completed his recovery. Still, he was very weak; his gaze wandered from the heap of treasure on the floor to the mortgage deed on the table, and unable to bear the sight of the latter, he ordered Jacob to place the little strong box in which he usually kept his papers on the table, and unlocking it with a trembling hand, deposited the deed within it. This seemed to be a great relief to him, for he presently became more composed, and rising, with his daughter's assistance, stepped towards the pile of money-bags, and tried, but ineffectually, to lift one of them.

"Do not attempt it, father," said Hilda. "You had better let Jacob carry this money into your own room; and let me also recommend you to retire to rest."

"No, no," replied the miser; "I shall not sleep till I have counted the gold in each of those sacks; and if I find any deficiency, let Sir Bulkeley look to it. Take them up stairs, Jacob."

The injunction was promptly obeyed, and Jacob had just completed his task, when a knock was heard at the door.

"Who can it be?" cried the miser. "Ah! now I recollect, it must be my attorney, Mr. Diggs. He was to call about the foreclosure. Curses on it! instead of being present at my triumph, he will witness my mortification. Jacob, if it should be Mr. Diggs, you may admit him, but no one else. Hilda, and sister Clinton, you had better retire to your own room. I have business to transact. You may as well say good night, for I shall go to bed as soon as Mr. Diggs leaves."

Hilda looked anxiously at her father, and kissed his brow.

"Have you anything to say, child?" he asked, touched by her affection.

"Only that I wish you would not count the money to-night," she replied. "You need rest."

"I shall sleep all the sounder for having counted it," he replied; "especially," he added, with great asperity, "if I find there is any mistake."

"Well, I hope you will be better to-morrow," sighed Hilda, and she withdrew with her aunt.

The next moment Jacob ushered into the room a respectable-looking middle-aged man, with smooth, rosy features, somewhat disfigured in their expression by what is termed a cocked eye. Indeed, no power of vision seemed to reside in the orb thus unnaturally fixed. This blemish excepted, Mr. Diggs—for he it was—might be said to have a prepossessing countenance, except that there were some lines of treachery about the mouth, and that the chin was very cunningly formed. He was plainly but handsomely attired in a dark suit, and had neither the air nor the manner of a pettifogging attorney, which, indeed, he was not. His voice was so agreeably modulated, that it fell almost like notes of music on the ear; and he had a very pleasing and very plausible address.

"Well, sir, am I to congratulate you?" he said, as he took the chair offered him by Jacob. "Do I pay my respects to a Welsh squire? Ha! ha!" But perceiving from the other's countenance that something was wrong, he changed his tone, and added—"I hope you are well, sir? From what I heard from your nephew, who has just left me, I expected to find you in high spirits."

The miser made no reply, but signed to Jacob to leave the room, which the latter did very reluctantly.

"The mortgage money has been paid, Diggs," said Mr. Scarve, coldly, as soon as they were alone.

"I am sorry to hear it," replied the other—"very sorry. But I feared as much from your countenance."

"Well, never mind it," replied the miser, forcing a smile. "It is a disappointment that can be borne."

"I am glad you take the matter so philosophically, sir," rejoined Diggs; "but I confess I cannot view the loss with equal indifference."

"Why, what interest, except professionally, can you feel in the matter?" said the miser, coldly.

"I take as much interest in the affairs of my clients as in my own," rejoined Diggs; "and it so happens you are not the only party who may suffer by this untoward and vexatious occurrence."

"Not the only party," repeated the miser. "You perplex me."

"I will explain myself, sir," returned Diggs. "Your nephew, as I told you, has just been with me. He spoke of his hopes of an union with your daughter, and of the settlement he proposed, in such an event, to make upon her; and concluded by hoping you would assign this very estate in Flintshire to her as a marriage portion."

"But I have it not, Diggs—I have it not!" cried the miser, pathetically.

"So I am sorry to learn," replied Diggs, "but—" and he slightly paused, as if calculating how far he could safely go—"you have the mortgage money."

"Mr. Diggs," replied the miser, fixing his keen grey eyes upon the attorney—"I told my nephew to-day that I would not give my daughter a farthing, and I am not one, you know, to waver in my resolution. What settlement does Philip propose to make upon her?"

"Nothing, sir," replied Diggs, affecting to be a little hurt—"nothing, without a corresponding settlement on your part. Nor could I honestly advise him to do otherwise."

"Then the match is at an end," rejoined Scarve; "and you may tell him so."

"I hope not, sir," replied the attorney; "you are both good clients, and having the interests of both sincerely at heart, I should like to see you more closely united. Your nephew would be a son to you, Mr. Scarve. He has a great regard as well as profound respect for you; and having precisely the same careful habits as yourself, your property will undergo no diminution, if it should ever come into his hands. I need not remind you of the large fortune he inherited from his father, whose will you have seen, but I may tell you—because I have no interdiction from him against so doing—that by the fortunate disposition of that money, by loans and otherwise, he has already added twenty thousand pounds to the amount; and in a few years, if he is equally fortunate, there is no doubt he will double it."

"Philip is a very clever young man, unquestionably," said the miser, his eyes sparkling with pleasure—"there are few such."

"You may truly say so, sir," replied Diggs; "and I should hesitate, if I were you, before I threw away the opportunity now offered of so good a match—one in all respects so accordant with your taste. You will at once perceive my meaning, sir, when I say that you would scarcely respect your nephew—certainly not give him credit for the prudence he possesses—if he were to accept your daughter without some marriage portion. It is not that he wants the money, nor that he doubts your ultimate intentions respecting her, but he deems it right, as a matter of propriety and fairness, that a sum equal to his own should be given."

"And what amount does he propose to settle?" inquired the miser.

"Twenty thousand pounds," replied Diggs.

"Hum!" exclaimed Scarve. And he continued for some time wrapped in thought, during which Diggs kept his single eye fixed upon him. "Well," he said, at length; "all things considered, I am disposed to stretch a point, and to do more than I intended. I will behave handsomely to my nephew, who deserves to be so dealt with. He shall settle thirty thousand pounds—mind, thirty thousand, Diggs!—on my daughter; and I will give them fourteen thousand—the very sum I have just received from that accursed Welsh baronet—on the day of the nuptials."

"I cannot, of course, take upon me to answer for Mr. Frewin, sir," replied Diggs, who could scarcely conceal his satisfaction, "but I hope and trust he will agree to the arrangement—indeed, I am pretty sure he will do so. He is devotedly attached to your daughter, and I am convinced he would make a sacrifice for her."

"He makes no sacrifice, sir," cried Scarve, sharply—"none whatever."

"I mean merely in feeling, sir," interrupted Diggs, in a deprecatory tone; "but since we have in a measure agreed upon the matter—for I will presume Mr. Frewin's assent—I may add, it is his earnest wish that the marriage should take place as soon as possible."

"I myself am wishful it should do so," replied the miser.

"In that case, there can be nothing to hinder it," rejoined Diggs, "always provided Mr. Frewin agrees to the arrangement, unless—but I presume you have consulted Miss Scarve on the subject?"

"My daughter has been accustomed to act in accordance with my wishes," returned the miser, coldly.

"I am glad to hear it, sir," said Diggs. "I merely threw out the suggestion, fearing an obstacle might occur in that quarter. My apprehension was, lest the young lady should not share in our good opinion of Mr. Frewin; inasmuch as she might attach a little more importance than we do to external appearances, forgetting the more essential qualities. I am quite of opinion that a father has a right to dispose of his daughter as he thinks fit. All laws, divine and human, give him that power, and he is perfectly justified in exercising it."

"I act as I believe for the best," replied the miser. "And now," he added, as if anxious to change the subject, "let us talk on other matters. There is the bond from Mr. Villiers; the annuity from Sir Thomas Lightfoot; and the four thousand pounds Lady Brabazon wants to borrow." And he forthwith plunged into details, into which it is unnecessary to follow him.

At the end of half an hour, Diggs rose to depart, and Jacob was summoned to attend him to the door. There was a significance in the porter's manner that satisfied the astute attorney he had been playing the eaves-dropper. He thought it therefore expedient to make friends with him, and he accordingly slipped a crown into his hand as he went forth. Jacob did not refuse the gift, but growled out, as he fastened the door, "This, and a thousand such sha'n't bribe me to betray my young missis. I overheard all their scheming, and she shall know it as well."

On returning to the parlour, he found the miser preparing to retire, and assisted him, for he was still very feeble, to get up stairs. The miser's bedroom was not a whit better furnished than the lower apartment. An old bedstead, without hangings, stood at one side, while opposite it was a washstand, of the commonest description. A number of old trunks, and one or two pictures, in a very dusty condition, were reared against the walls. The window was partly boarded up, partly grated. There was a small closet at the further end of the room, and a side door, though now fastened up, communicated with the chamber occupied by the two ladies. A small table, a stool, two large and stout oaken chests, clamped with iron, and a bureau of the same material as the chests, constituted the furniture of the closet. On the floor were laid the bags of gold. Having glanced at the heap, and counted it with his eye, the miser dismissed Jacob for the night, with the strictest injunctions to keep on the watch, for fear of any attempt to break into the house. And the better to enable him to protect the premises, he gave him a pistol—one of a brace, which he always kept loaded at his bedside. As soon as Jacob was gone, and he had locked the door, he set down the candle on the floor, and, with trembling eagerness, unfastened one of the sacks, and counted its glittering contents. The sum was right. He undid another, and found it correct; another, and another, and the same result, until all were emptied, and the floor was covered with gold. The miser gazed at the shining treasure, vainly trying to satiate his greedy soul with the sight; and then, at last, as if unable to contain himself, he threw himself upon the heap, in a species of delirium—clutching handfuls of the coin, and throwing them over him. His transports having subsided, he arose, again filled the sacks, tied them up, placed them in one of the chests, locked it, and in a state of high nervous excitement that forbade any hope of sleep, sought his couch.

Jacob, meanwhile, on quitting his master, crept stealthily to the ladies' chamber, and tapped against the door. The summons was immediately answered by Hilda, who anxiously inquired what was the matter. Jacob replied, in a low tone, that he wished to say a word to her before she retired to rest. Having delivered himself thus, he stole down stairs, and Hilda, who was a good deal alarmed, almost instantly followed him. He then told her what had passed between Mr. Scarve and his attorney concluding thus:—"I ought to be ashamed of myself, I know, miss, for listenin', and it's not my habit, I assure you; but being aware that Mr. Diggs is Mr. Philip's attorney, as well as master's, and couplin' his visit with what occurred this morning, I had some misgivings as to his errand, and therefore I did as I've told you."

Greatly disturbed by the intelligence, Hilda thanked the porter for his zeal, and returned noiselessly to her room, where she found relief in a plentiful flood of tears. Mrs. Clinton tried to soothe her, but it was long before she could succeed in doing so.

"What is to be done, dear aunt?" cried Hilda; "I know my father too well to doubt that, having resolved upon this hateful match, he will leave nothing undone to accomplish it. But I will die sooner than give my consent."

"I scarcely know how to advise you, my dear niece," replied Mrs. Clinton. "I do not like to counsel you to disobey your father, and yet I feel he ought not to force your inclinations."

"Alas!" exclaimed Hilda, again bursting into tears, "I have no friend to turn to."

"Yes, you have one," replied Mrs. Clinton, "who will, I am sure, assist you, and protect you, if necessary. But do not question me further on the subject to-night—rest satisfied with my assurance. And now, sweet niece, dry your tears, lay your head on the pillow, and try to compose yourself to slumber. Perhaps all will be right, and there may be no occasion to apply to any one. God bless you! good night!" Hilda complied with her aunt's suggestions—but sleep shunned her eyelids.

Jacob, who was really apprehensive that an attempt would be made to break into the house that night, determined to remain on the watch, and with this view ensconced himself in the miser's armchair, where, however, he found it impossible to resist the approaches of the drowsy god. His slumbers were long and sound, but were at length broken by the creaking of a door. Instantly starting to his feet, he snatched up the pistol which lay on the table beside him, and presented it at the head of the intruder, who proved to be his master. Mr. Scarve was in his nightdress, over which he had hastily slipped the robe he ordinarily wore, and thus seen in the bright moonlight, for he had no candle, looked almost like an apparition.

"Lord bless us!" exclaimed Jacob, lowering the pistol; "how you do frighten one! I took you for a housebreaker, and I'm not quite sure now you aren't a perturbed sperrit."

"I almost wish I was dead, Jacob," replied the miser, dolefully. "I cannot sleep."

"Don't wonder at it," replied the other, gruffly. "You've a bad conscience. I can sleep soundly enough, even in that *cheer*."

"I envy you, Jacob," groaned the miser.

"And well you may," rejoined Jacob, "riches don't always bring peace,—especially if they've been unjustly obtained. But I'll tell you what'll make you sleep as sound as a rock. Give up all idea of marryin' your daughter to your miserly nephew, Philip Frewin. It's that as disturbs you. You know you're doin' wrong in harbourin' such a thought."

"They're all leagued against me,—all!" shrieked the miser. "Scoundrel, you have been listening to what passed between me and Mr. Diggs."

"I wont deny it," replied Jacob, stoutly; "I have. And I tell you you're sacrificin' your daughter. Your nephew isn't what he seems, and Mr. Diggs is helpin' him to deceive you. You'll find 'em out when it's too late."

"You are mad, or drunk, or both, Jacob!" cried Scarve, fiercely.

"If I am mad, it's a very composed and collected kind of madness," rejoined Jacob; "but I should like to know which of us looks most like a madman; you, who can't rest in your bed, or me, who can sleep like a top in that *cheer*?"

"Well, well, I sha'n't bandy words with you," rejoined the miser, whose teeth were chattering with cold. "Is all safe?"

"I suppose so," answered Jacob. "I've heard nothing. Have you?"

"I thought I did," replied the miser, "but it might be your snoring."

"Well, go to bed," returned Jacob; "it's the best place for you. You'll catch your death o' cold standin' there. If it'll be any comfort to you I wont go to sleep again. I suppose it can't be far off midnight."

"It has just gone two," rejoined the miser; "I've heard the Abbey clock strike all the hours." And, refusing Jacob's offer of assistance, he groped his way to bed.

"I wouldn't be him for all his wealth," thought the porter, as he listened to his retreating footsteps.

Jacob was as good as his word. He kept watch till it was broad daylight, and then, thinking all secure, betook himself to bed for a couple of hours.

The family assembled at breakfast as usual. The miser looked unusually haggard, and Hilda's countenance betrayed the mental suffering she had undergone. Little was said during the scanty meal; and as soon as it was over, Mr. Scarve signified that he wished to have some private conversation with his daughter, upon which they were left alone together. He then, without any circumlocution, and in a much more peremptory manner than he had adopted before, told her he intended to give her to her cousin, and that he would listen to no further objections on her part.

"I cannot believe you will persist in this cruel resolution, sir," cried Hilda. "What have I done to deserve such treatment? But do not think you will succeed in your design. I repeat what I said yesterday. Neither entreaties nor threats shall induce me to marry my cousin."

"I will discard you, then," rejoined the miser, furiously.

But finding her wholly unmoved by the menace, he commenced pouring forth a torrent of invectives against the sex in general; complaining of the anxiety and torment they occasioned all those with whom they were connected, whether in the relation of wife, sister, or daughter; charging them with wilfulness, perversity, and blindness to their own interests; and ended by ordering her off to her own chamber, whither she was very glad to retreat.

By no means satisfied with himself, he next tried to occupy his mind by referring to his account-book; but it would not do, and, unable to sit still, he paced the room to and fro. He hoped Jacob would show himself, that he might have an object to vent his anger upon; but the porter, having some notion of the storm that awaited him, kept sedulously out of the way. He then resolutely returned to the account-book, and had at last fully succeeded in fixing his attention upon it, when a knock was heard at the door, and Jacob presently afterwards appeared, and informed him that Mr. Cordwell Firebras was without. The miser slightly started at the name, but hastily ordered Jacob to admit him. A friendly greeting took place between the miser and Firebras, at which Jacob was the more surprised, in that he did not remember having seen the latter before; but he thought, in spite of all his affected cordiality, that his master would have willingly dispensed with his visitor's company.

Warned by what had occurred on the previous night, Mr. Scarve ordered Jacob to go below, and took the precaution to see that his injunctions were obeyed. Though the porter's curiosity was considerably excited by what was going forward, he did not dare to listen, for fear of a discovery, and he accordingly whiled the time by applying to his secret store of provisions. In about an hour and a half, he was summoned by his master, who told him he was going out on business, and desired him to attend him to his room, whither he proceeded

"I suppose you want your coat, sir?" said Jacob. And opening a drawer in the chest, he took an old, sad-coloured garment from a faded handkerchief in which it was wrapped, and assisted his master to put it on. This done, he brought an old three-cornered hat, edged with tarnished lace, and dusting it, gave it to the miser, together with a crutch-handled stick.

Having locked the door of the closet, removed the key, and put it in his pocket, Mr. Scarve next went through the same operation at the door communicating with the gallery.

"I shall not return till evening, Jacob," he said. "Take care of the house during my absence."

"It must be important business to keep you out so long," replied Jacob, staring at the information.

"The business *is* important," rejoined the miser; "but I wish you would check your tendency to familiarity. It is growing upon you, and I am weary of it."

With this he descended to the lower room, and, taking some papers from Cordwell Firebras, which the latter had been reading, put them in his pocket, and they quitted the house together.

CHAPTER XII.

HILDA'S INTERVIEW WITH ABEL BEECHCROFT.

Jacob lost not a moment in communicating his master's departure to his young mistress, and Hilda, on hearing it, immediately came down stairs with her aunt.

"And now, my dear niece," said Mrs. Clinton, "since such a favourable opportunity presents itself, I would advise you to apply for counsel as to how to act to the person I told you would befriend you. This letter, committed to my care by my poor sister, and your mother, was written to be delivered in case of an emergency like the present—which she but too surely foresaw might arise—and it cannot fail of accomplishing its object."

"It is addressed to Mr. Abel Beechcroft," said Hilda, glancing at the inscription on the letter as she took it from her aunt. "Why, that must be the uncle of the young man who was here, the night before last. I cannot take it to *him*."

"Why not?" cried Mrs. Clinton.

"Because it would look like—but why need I care what construction is put upon my visit, since my heart acquits me of any improper motive?" said Hilda. "Aunt, I will go—that is, if you think it will answer any good purpose."

"I am sure it will," urged Mrs. Clinton.

"But if my father should accidentally return during our absence?" rejoined Hilda.

"I do not think it likely he will do so," returned the aunt; "but if he should, I must bear the brunt of his displeasure. Go, my love. Something tells me the visit will be productive of great advantage to you. Jacob will accompany you."

"That I will," he replied; "I'll follow you to the world's end, if you wish it."

Hilda yielded at length to her aunt's entreaties, and having put on her walking attire, quitted the house with Jacob. Instead of going over Westminster Bridge they proceeded to Parliament Stairs, where Jacob said he had a friend a waterman, who would lend him a boat, in which they could cross the river. Nor did he assert more than the truth. On reaching the stairs, the first person he encountered was the friendly waterman in question, who, on learning his wishes, immediately ran down and got his skiff ready. Having placed Hilda within it, Jacob took off his coat, and plying the oars with as much skill as the best rower on the Thames could have done, speedily landed her at Lambeth, and secured the boat, where he inquired the way to Mr. Beechcroft's house.

A walk of a few seconds brought them to it. Hilda's heart trembled as she knocked at the door; but she was reassured by the kindly aspect of Mr. Jukes, who answered the summons. She stated her errand to the butler, who appeared not a little surprised, and, indeed, confounded at the announcement of her name. After a short debate with himself, Mr. Jukes said his master was at home, and she should see him; and, without more ado, he led the way to the library and entered it, followed by the others.

Abel was seated beside an old-fashioned bookcase, the door of which was open, disclosing a collection of goodly tomes, and had placed the book-stand supporting the volume he was reading, in such a position as to receive the full light of the window. So much was he engaged in his studies, that he did not hear their approach. In the hasty glance cast by Hilda at the pictures on the wall, the most noticeable of which was a copy of Rembrandt's "Good Samaritan," and a fine painting on the subject of Timon of Athens, she thought she could read somewhat of the character of the owner of the house. Little time, however, was allowed her for reflection, for Mr. Jukes, advancing towards his master's chair, leaned over it, and whispered a few words in his ear.

"What!—who!—who did you say?" exclaimed Abel, half closing the book he was reading, and looking sharply and anxiously round. "Who did you say, Jukes?"

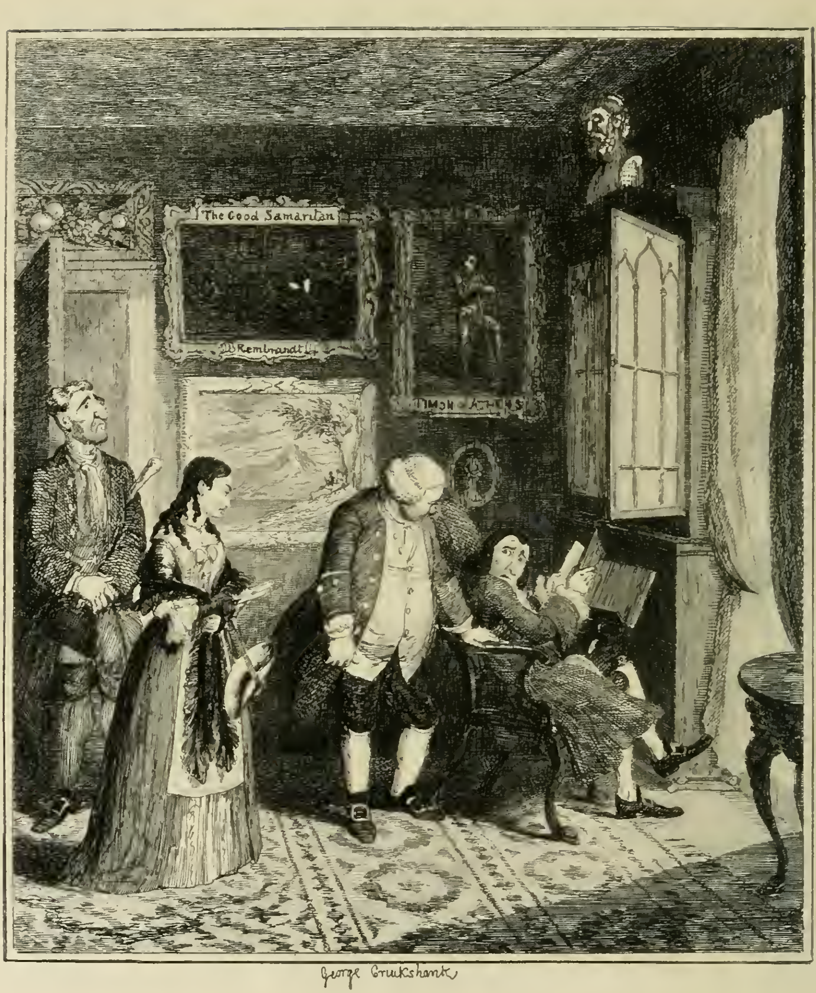
"Miss Scarve, sir," replied the butler; "she has brought you a letter."

"Tell her I wont receive it—wont open it!" cried Abel. "Why did you not send her away? What brings her here?"

"You had better put that question to her yourself, sir," replied Mr. Jukes, "for she is in this room."

"Here!" exclaimed Abel, starting to his feet. "Ah! I see—I see. O God! she is very like her mother."

"Calm yourself, I entreat, sir," said Mr. Jukes; "I would not


The Good Samaritan
Rembrandt
TIMON of ATHENS

George Cruikshank

Hilda's visit to Abel Beechcroft.

have admitted her," he added, in a low tone, "but that she told me the letter was written by her mother, and left to be delivered to you under peculiar circumstances, which have now arisen. I couldn't resist a plea like that,—nor could you, sir, I'm sure."

"A letter written to me by her mother!' cried Abel, shivering, as if smitten by an ague. "Leave us, Jukes, and take that man with you."

"Come, friend," said Mr. Jukes to Jacob, who, with his crab-stick under his arm, stood gazing curiously on, "you had better adjourn with me to the butler's pantry."

"Thank'ee, kindly, sir," replied Jacob, in tones a little less gruff than usual, for he was somewhat awe-stricken; "I would rather stay with my young missis."

"But don't you see you're in the way, my good man?" rejoined Mr. Jukes, impatiently; "they can't talk before us. Come along." And despite his resistance, he pushed Jacob out of the room, and closed the door after him.

"You have a letter for me, young lady, I believe," faltered Abel, in a voice hollow and broken by emotion.

"I have, sir," she replied, giving it to him.

Abel looked at the address, and another sharp convulsion passed over his frame. He, however, controlled himself by a powerful effort, and broke the seal. The perusal of the letter seemed to affect him deeply, for, staggering to his chair, he sank into it, and covering his face with his hands, wept aloud. It was some minutes before he arose. Hilda, who had watched him with much concern, was surprised to see how calm he looked. He had, indeed, regained the mastery he usually held over his feelings.

"Pray be seated, young lady," he said, handing her a chair. "I would have shunned this interview if it had been in my power, but as it has been brought about, I will not shrink from it. How can I serve you?"

Hilda then proceeded to explain the object of her visit. Abel listened to her recital with a quivering lip and flashing eye, and at its close got up, and took a quick turn round the room.

"This is only what might be expected from him—scoundrel!" he ejaculated. "Sell his daughter!—but that is nothing—he would sell his soul for gold! I beg your pardon, young lady," he added, checking himself, as he saw the pain his exclamations occasioned her, "but if you knew the deep and irremediable injury inflicted on me by your father, you would pardon this outbreak of passion. He has sacrificed others without scruple, but he shall not sacrifice you. You may count on my assistance, my protection, if you choose to confide in me."

"I have my mother's injunction to confide in you, sir," she replied.

"Your mother!" exclaimed Abel, in a voice of agony. "Oh, Hilda! what a fearful spell is there in that word!—what a host of feelings does it not summon up! I see your mother again as I remember her in her youth,—beautiful as you are, more beautiful, if possible—certainly more blooming. I hear the music of her voice as I listen to yours; I feel again the charm inspired by her presence. You shall learn my history one of these days, and you will then know why your mother addressed this letter to me—why it affects me thus."

"I can partly guess the cause," returned Hilda, mournfully; "but be it what it may, it is plain she felt she had a strong hold on your affections, and that she thought she could rely on you when she could rely on no one else."

"If she thought so, she judged rightly," replied Abel. "I consider her request as a sacred injunction, and will strive to comply with it. And now," he added, changing his tone, "I must tell you that your name has been brought before me of late. My nephew, Randulph Crew, who visited your father the other night, has spoken of you."

Hilda slightly coloured.

"He will much regret not being at home this morning," pursued Abel, "as he might have had an opportunity of further cultivating his acquaintance with you. But he is gone out with my brother."

"I hope it will not offend you to say I am glad of it," replied Hilda; "I would not willingly have met him."

"Why so?" asked Abel, who, however, looked somewhat relieved.

"Because, sir, I will be frank with you," she replied, "and own that my father attributes my increased dislike of my cousin to a predilection for your nephew."

"And may I expect equal frankness in the reply, if I ask whether there is any truth in your father's suppositions?" rejoined Abel.

"You may," she answered. "Your nephew appears a very amiable and pleasing young man, but having seen him only for a few minutes, I cannot possibly feel an interest in him, beyond such as might be inspired by any stranger of equally prepossessing appearance and manners. My aversion to my cousin arises from various causes. I half suspect him of acting a very base part towards my father, who resolutely shuts his eyes to the deception."

"I will not affect to deny that I am pleased with what you say of your indifference to my nephew, Hilda," returned Abel, "because I have other views in reference to him. As to your cousin, Philip Frewin, I will make strict inquiries about him, and if your suspicions prove correct, I will myself unmask him to your father, which may perhaps put an end to the matter. He lives in Fenchurch-street, you say. It so happens that an old friend of mine, a widow lady, Mrs. Verral,—a friend of your mother's, by-the-by,—resides in that street. She is an excellent woman, but a little of a busy-body and a gossip, and makes it her business to know her neighbours' concerns better than her own. I'll venture to say she is acquainted with your cousin's affairs. I haven't seen the old lady of late, because, as you may perhaps have heard, I have little intercourse with your sex,—my habits, and indeed feelings, unfitting me for their society,—but I happen to know from my brother Trussell that she is well. You had better go to her yourself. I will give you a note of introduction—though, indeed, it is not needed, for, as I have told you, she is an old friend of your mother's. In addition to gaining all the information you may require respecting your cousin, you will make a friend with whom you may take refuge, if matters—which we will not anticipate—should unhappily render such a step necessary."

"I will do as you suggest, sir," replied Hilda; "but suppose I should encounter my cousin?"

"Tell him where you are going," replied Abel; "and depend upon it, if he is not what he represents himself, he will be the first to take the alarm. I will myself institute inquiries about him in another quarter."

With this, he proceeded to a table on which writing materials were placed, and hastily penned a note, and gave it to Hilda.

"And now, God bless you, my dear child!" he said, affectionately. "If called upon by circumstances, you shall never want a father or protector in me!"

He then rang the bell, and Mr. Jukes presently appeared, who informed him that Jacob had just sat down to dinner with the other servants.

"I think, sir," he added, in a low tone, "it is the first good meal he has had for many a day, and it would be a pity to disturb him, if Miss Scarve is not in a very great hurry."

Abel appealed to Hilda, and as she raised no objection, he proposed to her to take a turn in the garden till Jacob had finished his meal; and accordingly opened the window, and led her forth.

By this time Hilda had become more composed, and being quite easy with the old man, for whom indeed she felt a growing regard, she entered readily into conversation with him; and thus more than half an hour flew by, almost without their being aware of its flight. At the end of that time, Mr. Jukes made his appearance, and informed them that Jacob was ready.

Abel attended his fair visitor to the door.

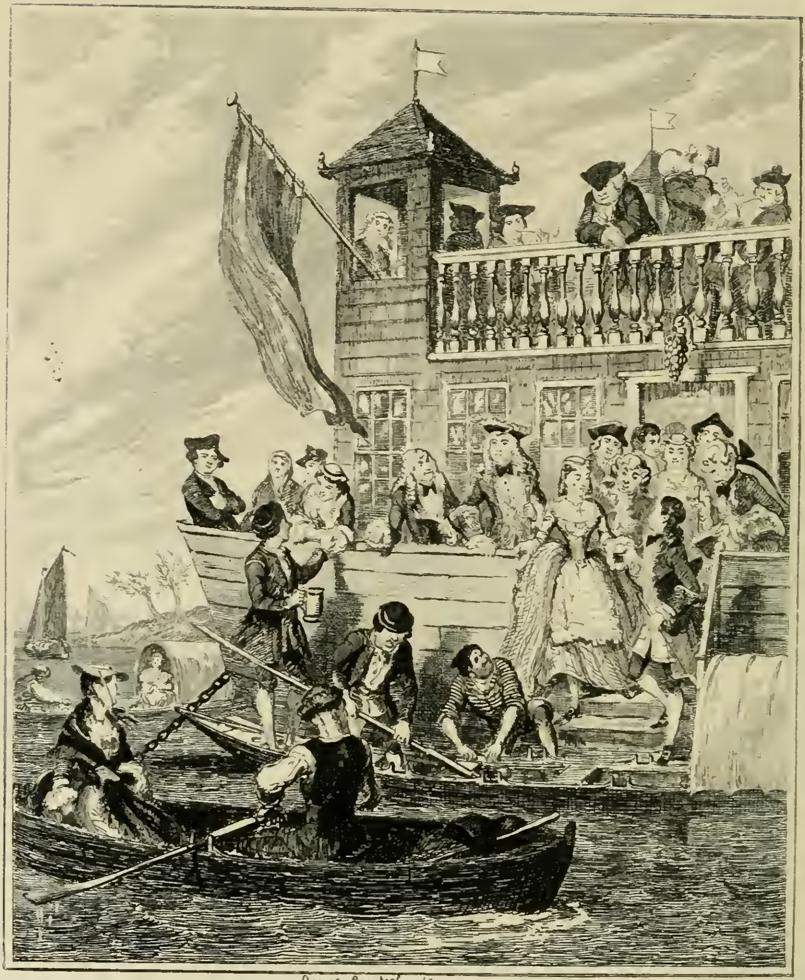
"If you do not find Mrs. Verral at home," he said, "or if anything should occur to make you wish to see me again, do not hesitate to come back. But, in any event, you shall hear from me—perhaps see me, to-morrow. God bless you, my child!" And taking her hand, he pressed it to his lips; and when Hilda withdrew it, she found it wet with tears.

While this was passing, Jacob shook the hospitable butler warmly by the hand, and then strode on before his young mistress, towards the stairs where he had left the boat. Having placed her within it, and divested himself of his coat, cravat, and hat, as before, he inquired where she meant to go, and being told to London Bridge, pulled off vigorously in that direction.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FOLLY ON THE THAMES—KITTY CONWAY—RANDULPH PLACED IN AN AWKWARD SITUATION BY PHILIP FREWIN.

The Folly on the Thames, whither Beau Villiers and his party were steering their course, was a large floating house of entertainment moored in the centre of the stream, immediately opposite Old Somerset House. It was constructed in the latter part of the reign of Charles the Second; and thither the merry monarch, who was excessively fond of aquatic amusements of all kinds, would frequently repair with his courtiers and frolic dames. Thither also Queen Mary, the consort of William the Third, went on the occasion of a grand musical entertainment; and the place continued in vogue for many years, until at length, degenerating in its character, it became the haunt of a very disreputable part of the community. The Folly resembled a large one-storied house, very long in proportion to its width, built upon an immense barge. There was a platform at the top, defended by a strong wooden balustrade, and flanked at each corner by a little turret with a pointed top, surmounted by a small streamer. These turrets constituted small drinking and smoking rooms, and were fitted up with seats and tables. In the centre of the structure was a sort of open belvidere, covering the main staircase leading to the roof. On this a large flag was planted. The Folly was approached from the water by steps on three sides. It was lighted by a range of large and handsome windows, and entered by two doors, one at the end, and the other at the side. Within, it contained a long music-hall with a frescoed ceiling, gilded and painted walls, an orchestra and the necessary complement of benches, chairs, and small tables. There was, moreover, a bar, where all sorts of liquors, materials for smoking, and other tavern luxuries were dispensed. The rest of the structure was divided into a number of small apartments for private parties, and, in short, boasted every sort of accommodation afforded by a similar place of entertainment on shore. In summer it was delightful


George Cruikshank

The Folly on the Thames

—the view of the Thames from its summit being enchanting. The coolness and freshness, combined with the enlivening influences of beauty, wine, and music, made it, on its first establishment, a charming place of recreation; and it cannot be wondered that the merry monarch, and his merrier court, found it so much to their taste.

As the party approached the aquatic hotel, they perceived a number of persons, of both sexes, seated on the roof, and in the little turret parlours, smoking, drinking, or otherwise amusing themselves; while lively strains of music proceeded from within. Several small craft were landing their passengers, and from one, a tilt boat, there issued a very pretty young woman, though of rather bold appearance, who, as she took the hand of a young man in her ascent of the steps, displayed a remarkably neat foot and ankle. On reaching the deck, she turned for a moment to survey the scene, and her eye alighting on Randulph, his good looks appeared to rivet her regards.

This fascinating creature seemed to be about twenty; had very regular features, auburn hair, a brilliant complexion—whether wholly unindebted to art might be questioned—but there could be no question as to the natural brilliancy of her hazel eyes; and wore a pink silk hooped gown, made very low in front, so as to display her beautifully-formed and radiantly-white neck and shoulders. Her sleeves were very short, probably so contrived with the view of exhibiting her rounded arms, and edged with lace. A white silk apron embroidered with silver, a pretty fly-cap, and a necklace of precious stones, from which depended a diamond cross, completed her attire. The young man by whom she was attended, had a slight, thin figure, and sharp disagreeable features, with rather an apish expression. He was dressed with much smartness, but had by no means the air of a gentleman, and seemed to be regarded with indifference, almost amounting to contempt, by his female companion.

"Who is that young lady?" asked Randulph of Sir Singleton, who happened to sit next him.

"Let me see!" exclaimed the old beau, placing his glass to his eye. "Ah! gadzooks! 'tis the delicious creature I mentioned to you—the little Haymarket actress, Kitty Conway!"

"Kitty Conway! where is she?" cried Trussell, who heard the remark, but whose back was towards the object of their admiration.

Sir Singleton pointed her out, and upon the instant every eye was directed towards her. Whether unable to stand so fierce a fire, or whether, as is more probable, dragged away by her companion, who did not appear to relish the notice she attracted, it is needless to inquire, but pretty Kitty suddenly vanished from their sight.

"Well, isn't she delicious?" cried Trussell to Randulph.

"Egad! you have made a conquest of pretty Kitty, my boy. I saw the parting glance she gave you over her shoulder as she whisked through the door. Don't lose sight of her. You can soon put the city beau, by whom she is attended, *hors de combat.*"

Further remarks were interrupted by the arrival of the boat at the steps. A strange, black muzzled fellow, in a Guernsey shirt, with bare arms and bare legs, and who was a regular attendant at the Folly, helped them to disembark; and his request to "be remembered" by the beau being met with a very munificent rejoinder, he well-nigh lost his balance in his glee and got a tumble into the water.

The party then entered the music-hall, and just as they passed through the door, Randulph chancing to look behind him, perceived that the stranger had likewise landed, and was mounting the steps. The novel scene, however, before him, so completely engrossed his attention, that he could think of little else. Upwards of a hundred persons of both sexes thronged the room; many of the ladies were masked, and a good deal of freedom marked their conduct. They talked and laughed loudly and recklessly. At one end of the hall, the benches were taken aside to allow Kitty Conway and her companion, with some other couples, to perform the cushion dance. At the upper end of the room stood the musicians. The party made their way towards the dancers, and the beau and Sir Singleton praised Kitty's beauty in tones so loud, and in terms of admiration so strong, as would have occasioned confusion to any young lady troubled with a more oppressive sense of bashfulness than she was. Her partner did not know whether to look pleased or annoyed. He was evidently overpowered by the presence of Beau Villiers, whom he regarded with a species of awe; and as these applauses of Kitty gave a fancied consequence to himself, he was weak enough to be gratified by them. Towards the close of the figure, a particular step, executed by the pretty actress, elicited more than usual rapture from Sir Singleton, and he called to Randulph—"Look at her, Mr. Randulph Crew. Is it not delicious?"

At the sound of this name, Kitty's partner started, and stared so hard at Randulph, that he could scarcely finish the dance.

"Upon my word, Philip Frewin, you are a very stupid partner," said the actress to him. "If you do not exert yourself more, I shall ask that handsome young fellow, who is ogling me there, to take my hand in the next set."

"I am quite fatigued, Kitty," replied Philip, confusedly; "let us have some refreshment—a little 'rack punch, or a glass of champagne."

Kitty Conway assented, and they moved off to one of the side tables, where a waiter speedily placed glasses before them, and opened a bottle of champagne. It must be confessed—unwilling as we are to admit it—that Randulph was not altogether proof against the undisguised admiration of the pretty actress, and that he could not help returning the tender glances she shot towards him.

Meanwhile, the performances went forward; an Irish jig followed, in which Randulph and Sir Singleton joined; this was succeeded by some comic songs; and Mr. Villiers, who did not altogether relish the entertainment, walked forth, and was soon after followed by the others. As they all stood leaning over the sides of the bark, laughing at what had occurred, and admiring the gaiety of the scene, a skiff, impelled by a vigorous rower, as was evident by the progress it made, and containing a young female, wrapped in a black silk scarf, and with raven tresses, scarcely covered by a small bonnet, floating in the breeze, rapidly neared them. Various speculations were put forth as to whether this young female would prove as pretty on a nearer inspection as she looked at a distance; but in these Randulph took little part. To speak truth, his thoughts were running upon the fair syren within, and happening to cast his eyes towards the platform above, he perceived, leaning over the balustrade, and gazing at him, the stranger!

At this juncture, Philip Frewin came forth to see whether his boat was in readiness, and admonished the watermen, one of whom was philandering with a buxom damsel who was leaning over the side of the deck, that he should start immediately. He had scarcely, however, issued the order than his eye fell upon the skiff containing the young female before mentioned, and which was now close at hand. He started as if an apparition had met his gaze, ducked down, and would have made his escape into the music-hall, if Kitty Conway had not placed herself in his way. Retreat was now impossible, and Philip's distress was heightened by the fair actress, who exclaimed, somewhat pettishly, "Why do you leave me here, sir? Why don't you hand me to the boat?"

Philip was almost at his wit's end, The skiff containing Hilda and Jacob, both of whom he had too clearly recognised, though he could not account for their appearance, unless it were a trick of the fiend to convict him, was so near, that if he complied with Kitty's request, discovery would be inevitable. A plan suddenly occurred to him, by which he hoped to free himself from risk, and place Randulph, whom he had reason to regard as a rival, in an awkward dilemma.

Without apprising Kitty of his intention, he drew her forward, and bending down as low as he could, to elude observation, said to Randulph—"Will you have the kindness, sir, to hand this lady into her boat? You will do me an infinite favour; I have dropped a pocket-book in the music-hall, and must go back to search for it."

Randulph was a good deal surprised by the proposal, but he unhesitatingly consented; and, taking Kitty's hand, which she very graciously accorded, rewarding his attention by a slight squeeze, led her down the steps. All this occurred to the infinite amusement of Trussell, who stood a little back near the door, ogling a rather pretty damsel, and to the no slight chagrin of Sir Singleton, who, guessing the intention of Philip Frewin, had pushed forward to offer his services, but found himself supplanted. But these were not the only witnesses of the scene. By this time, the skiff, containing Hilda, had come up, and with a pang of jealous feeling, neither to be accounted for nor controlled, she beheld Randulph handing the pretty actress, whose character she could scarcely mistake, down the steps. Jacob saw what was passing as well as herself, but, having no jealousy to divert his attention from other matters, he detected Philip Frewin even in his disguise, and, resting on his oars, exclaimed, "Look! miss, look!—there is your cousin Philip. Is that the dress he wore yesterday? I told master he wasn't what he seemed. Look at him, I say!"

But Hilda was too much agitated to heed these exclamations. She could see nothing but Randulph and the pretty actress. Nor was she without embarrassment on her own account; for Mr. Cripps, having recognised her, pointed her out to his master, and the beau, being much struck with her beauty, favoured her with a very insolent stare. But if Randulph had been guilty of disloyalty towards the object of his affections, his punishment was not long delayed; for, as he handed Kitty into the boat, which was steadied by the black-muzzled Jack, before mentioned, his gaze encountered that of Hilda, and he was instantly filled with confusion. He tried to disengage himself from the actress, who, however, sportively detained him, and, unable to retreat, he cut a most ridiculous figure. Indeed, he was not a little relieved, though he felt how much he should sink in her esteem, when he saw Hilda bend forward, and order Jacob, who continued resting on his oars, to pass on. He continued gazing after the skiff till it was out of sight; but Hilda did not look back.

Meanwhile, as Philip Frewin did not make his appearance, Kitty Conway became very impatient, and turning a deaf ear to all the high-flown compliments showered upon her by Sir Singleton Spinke, entreated Randulph to go and see what her friend was doing. The young man could not very well refuse compliance with the request, and he accordingly entered the music-hall, and returned in a few minutes with Philip, who, finding the coast clear, recovered his composure, and tendering his thanks, in a very abject manner, to Randulph, got into the boat with Kitty, and ordered the men to row to Savoy Stairs. Randulph was too angry with himself, and now too indifferent to the fascinations of the pretty actress to return the tender glance with which she favoured him on her departure.

The incident, however, afforded abundant merriment to his companions, who were greatly diverted by his looks, which they attributed to jealousy, and they endeavoured to remove the feeling by assuring him that Kitty had exhibited a decided preference for him. His uneasiness was not relieved by the admiration expressed of the miser's daughter by Beau Villiers, nor was Trussell altogether pleased to find the beau so much captivated. That Hilda should have passed at the precise juncture seemed to surprise everybody.

CHAPTER XIV.

RANDULPH'S INTERVIEW WITH CORDWELL FIREBRAS IN THE CLOISTERS OF WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

SHORTLY after this, the party entered their boat, and returned to Whitehall Stairs. Randulph had been so much engrossed by his own feelings, that he forgot the stranger, and only called him to mind a few minutes after he had landed, and when it was too late to look for him. He did not, however, forget his appointment with the writer of the mysterious letter, and, regardless of the construction that might be put upon it, told his uncle he had a particular engagement, which he must keep, at six o'clock. Trussell smiled significantly at the announcement, but made no remark, and proposed that they should all dine at one of the French ordinaries in Suffolk Street. Beau Villiers pleaded an engagement, but Sir Singleton acquiesced, and the trio repaired to the ordinary, where an excellent dinner was set before them.

Mindful of his appointment, Randulph, in spite of the jokes of his companions, who strove to detain him, got up from table at five o'clock, and took his way past Charing-cross and Whitehall, towards the Abbey. He could not resist the impulse that prompted him to pass through the Little Sanctuary, and felt half disposed to call at the miser's, and offer some explanation of his conduct to Hilda. Though the absurdity of the notion caused him to abandon it almost as soon as formed, he lingered before the house for a few minutes in the hope of discerning some of its inmates, but was disappointed.

He then entered Peter Pokerich's shop, to inquire the way to the Abbey cloisters.

It chanced that the little barber was about to take an evening stroll with the fair Thomasine, who was waiting for him, and he offered to show Randulph the way; but this the young man, who had his own reasons for not desiring the attendance of the inquisitive barber, declined, though in such a way as to excite Peter's curiosity, who secretly determined to follow him. As soon as Randulph was gone, he mentioned his design to the fair Thomasine, who was nothing loath to accompany him, and they set out together, taking special care to keep out of Randulph's view. The young man shaped his course towards the Abbey, and, skirting its western extremity, passed under the archway leading to the playground of Westminster school. Here he paused, and, addressing a porter, was directed towards another archway, through which he passed, and entered the cloisters. On seeing this, Peter, still accompanied by his fair companion, ran forward, and finding that Randulph was walking in the south ambulatory, they struck into the west, being still able to watch him through the open columns.

Randulph, meanwhile, unconscious that he was the object of such scrutiny, slowly traversed the ambulatory, and, charmed with the exquisite groined arches of its roof, hoary with age, and the view afforded through the shafted windows looking into the quadrangle, of the reverend buttresses and of the Abbey, almost forgot the object that brought him thither. He was arrested at the eastern extremity by the ancient inscriptions and brasses, pointing out the resting-places of the old abbots Laurentius, Gislesbertus, and Vitalis, when a heavy footstep sounded on his ear, and, looking up, he beheld the stranger. Before he could recover his surprise at this unexpected apparition, the new comer advanced towards him, and with a slight inclination of the head, and a singularly significant smile, said, "So you have kept your appointment with me, Mr. Randulph Crew."

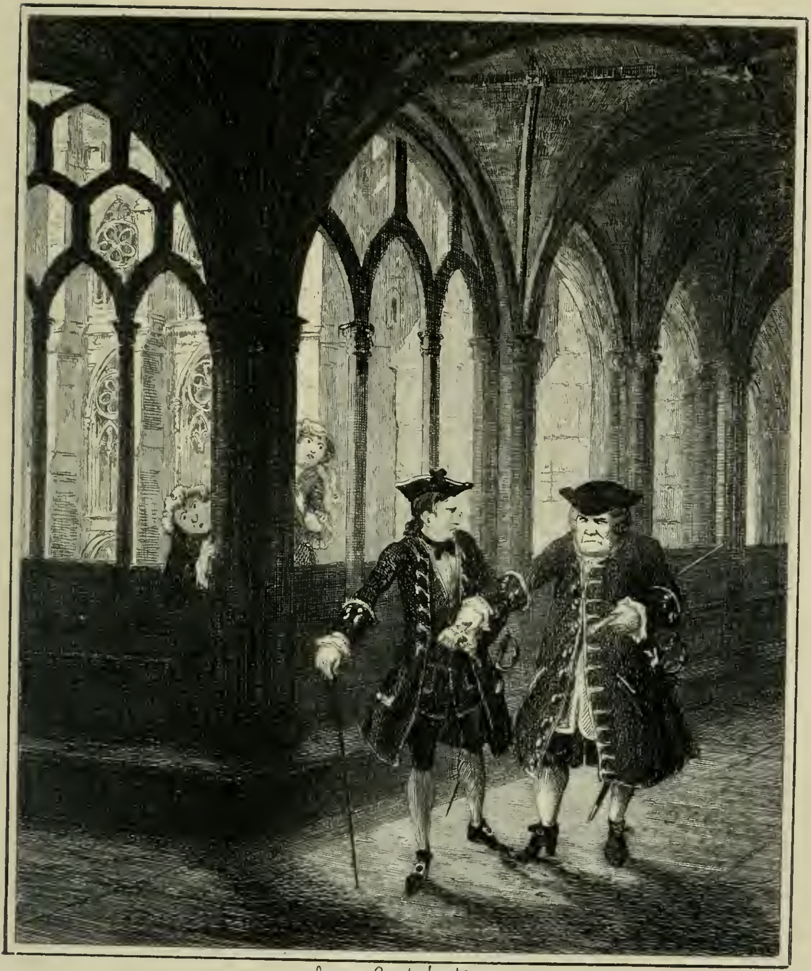
"Are you, then, Mr. Cordwell Firebras?" exclaimed Randulph, in surprise.

"I am so called," replied the other.

"I was little aware, sir, when I saw you this morning at the barber's, how soon and how strangely we should be brought together again," rejoined Randulph: "but this in some measure accounts for the manner in which you have haunted me throughout the day. Perhaps you will now explain your motive for doing so, as well as for summoning me hither."

"All in good time, young gentleman," replied Cordwell Firebras, gravely. "Before I advert to my own concerns let me say a word on yours. Answer me truly—have you not conceived an affection for Hilda Scarve? Nay, you need not answer. Your hesitation convinces me you have. Circumstances led you into acting very injudiciously this morning at the Folly, and I fear your conduct may have produced an unfavourable impression on Hilda's mind,—for I watched her closely. But heed not this. I will set all to rights. I have much influence with her father. He designs her for another—the apish gallant of the pretty actress who fascinated you this morning. But you shall have her, nevertheless,—on one condition."

"Despite the singularity of your address, there is an earnestness in your manner that inspires me with confidence in you, sir,"



George Cruikshank

Randulph's interview with Cordwell Firebras in the Cloisters of Westminster Abbey.

rejoined Randulph; "the rather, that you told me this morning you were an old friend of my father's. I will freely confess to you that I am captivated by the miser's daughter, and that I would hazard much to obtain her. Now, on what condition do you propose to make her mine?"

"You shall learn presently," replied Firebras, evasively. "Let us take a turn along the cloisters," he added, moving slowly forward.

They marched on together in silence, until they reached the eastern angle of the ambulatory, when Firebras, suddenly halting, laid his heavy hand upon Randulph's arm, and fixed a searching look upon him.

"Young man," he said, "I will tell you what you must do to gain the miser's daughter."

"What? what?" demanded Randulph.

"You must join the Jacobite party," replied Firebras; "to which her father belongs—to which your father belonged—and to which your mother also belongs."

Surprise kept Randulph silent. But neither he nor his companion were aware that this treasonable proposition had been overheard by Peter Pokerich and the fair Thomasine, who, having stolen upon them unperceived, were ensconced behind the shafts of the adjoining arches.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. CLINTON'S ALARM—THE MISER'S UNEXPECTED RETURN—THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE MORTGAGE MONEY—EFFRONTERY OF PHILIP FREWIN AND DIGGS.

DAY wore on, and Mrs. Clinton, wondering at her niece's prolonged stay, became extremely apprehensive lest Mr. Scarve should return before her, and discover her absence. She had just despatched her scanty dinner, having waited more than an hour for Hilda, removed the things, that they might not excite the miser's suspicion in case of his sudden return, and sat down to her needlework, on which she was diligently, though almost mechanically employed, when she was startled by a sound like the opening of a window, followed by a stealthy tread, in one of the rooms upstairs. The idea of robbers instantly occurred to her, for she recollected the large amount of gold in the house, as well as the public manner in which it had been paid, and she felt how likely it was an attempt might be made to carry it off, especially if it had been ascertained that she was alone in the house. She had heard of murders committed in lone habitations in broad day, and, in most cases, upon defenceless females like herself; and filled with indescribable terror, she rushed forth, with the intention of giving the alarm. Before she gained the passage, a knock was heard at the street door, and hurrying to it, she hastily, and with trembling hands, unfastened it, and beheld the miser. If she was startled by his appearance, he was not less so by hers; and, fixing a terrible look upon her, he demanded why Jacob had not let him in? Receiving no answer, he pushed her roughly into the passage, and clapping the door hastily to, proceeded to the parlour.

Poor Mrs. Clinton scarcely knew what to do, but at last she followed him, and found him pacing to and fro within the room like one distracted. "Where is Jacob?" he cried, running towards her, and seizing her arm. "Is the rascal gone out without leave? Why don't you speak, woman? Have you dared to send him out?—or has Hilda?"

"He will be back directly," replied Mrs. Clinton, almost frightened out of her senses. "I expected him long before this."

"Then he *is* gone out," cried the miser, as if he was unwilling to credit what he heard; "and Hilda, I suppose, is gone with him?"

Mrs. Clinton returned a terrified affirmative.

"And where, in the devil's name, are they gone to?" roared the miser.

"I am not at liberty to say," replied Mrs. Clinton.

"I *will* have an answer!" cried the miser, glaring at her as if he would annihilate her. "Where is she gone?"

"You will extort nothing from me by this violence," returned Mrs. Clinton, firmly.

"Then you shall quit my house to-night!" he rejoined, fiercely. "I will not have my authority set at nought. Seek another home, madam, and another protector."

The poor lady hung her head, but made no reply.

"Mrs. Clinton," he continued, with forced calmness, "I put it to yourself—and unless I am altogether mistaken in you, you will not be insensible to the appeal—I put it to you, I say, whether, when I demand, as a father, to know what has become of my daughter, you can reconcile it to your conscience not to tell me?"

"I *will* tell you thus much, sir," she replied, after a pause—"Hilda has been induced to take this step solely in consequence of your determination to unite her to her cousin. She is gone to consult a friend."

"What friend?" cried the miser, springing towards her. "I insist upon knowing."

"She is gone to see Mr. Abel Beechcroft," replied Mrs. Clinton.

If a heavy blow had been dealt him, the unhappy man could not have been more staggered than by this information. He turned away in confusion, muttering—"Abel Beechcroft! Why should she go to him?"

"Because her poor mother left a letter to be delivered to him if circumstances should require it," rejoined Mrs. Clinton.

"And you gave her that letter?" cried the miser.

"I did," she replied.

"And you sent her to her father's bitterest enemy for advice?" he continued. "It is well—it is well!" and he strode to the side door, as if with the intention of going up to his bed-room.

Up to this moment, Mrs. Clinton had forgotten the circumstance that had so recently alarmed her, but she now recalled it, and ran after him, crying, "Sir! sir!"

"What does the woman want?" demanded the miser, turning fiercely upon her.

The answer stuck in her throat. Dreading to provoke a fresh explosion of rage, she muttered some unintelligible excuse, and retired.

The miser, meanwhile, having obtained access to his chamber, threw his hat upon the bed, passed on, and unlocked the door of the closet. Marching up to the large chest in which he had deposited the bags of gold on the previous night, he sat down upon it, and was for some time lost in deep and painful reflection. He then rose, and taking a bunch of keys from his pocket, applied one of them to the lock of the chest. It would not turn, and imagining that he must have made some mistake, he drew it out and tried another. This, however, did not fit at all; and returning the first, he perceived, on examination, that it was the right one. Again applying it, and proceeding more carefully, he found, to his surprise and dismay, that the chest was not locked. Well knowing he had not left it in this state, he felt convinced that something must be wrong, and it was long before he could prevail upon himself to raise the lid. When he did so, he started back with a cry of anguish and despair.

The chest was empty!

For some minutes he remained as if transfixed, with his hands stretched out, his mouth wide open, his eyes almost starting from their sockets, and fixed upon the void where his treasure should have been.

At length he shrieked in accents of despair, "I have been robbed—robbed of my gold!—robbed—robbed! It is a wicked thing—a cruel thing to rob me! Others do not love gold as I love it. I love it better than wife, child, mistress,—better than life itself! Would that they had killed me, rather than take my gold! Oh! those fair shining pieces—so broad, so bright, so beautiful!—what has become of them?"

After a pause, during which he experienced the acutest mental anguish, he looked around to see how the robbery could have been effected. A moment's examination showed him that the iron bars in front of the little window opposite the chest had been removed.

"The villians must have found entrance here!" he cried, rushing towards the window. And clambering up an old oaken bureau that stood near it, he pushed it wide open, and stretching his long, scraggy neck through it, gazed into the little garden beneath.

Unable to discover anything, he drew back, and casting his eyes over the bureau, perceived that the dust with which it was covered had been slightly brushed away; but whether by himself or the depredators it was now, of course, impossible to determine. A bottle standing on one corner of the bureau had not been removed. It was clear that the plunderers had gone direct to the chest, of which they must have possessed a key, for the lock, though strained, had not been forced. Maddened by these reflections, and unable to account for the occurrence, he again vented his fury in words.

"I have it!" he shrieked, "it is that accursed Welsh baronet who has robbed me. He paid me the money in this public way only to delude me. I'll charge him with the robbery—I'll prove it against him—I'll hang him! Oh! it would delight me to hang him! I would give a thousand pounds to see it done! A thousand pounds! What is that to the fourteen thousand I have lost? I shall go mad, and it were happy for me to do so. Philip Frewin will refuse to marry my daughter. Her portion is gone—gone! Why was I tempted forth with Firebras? I ought to have taken my seat on that chest—to have eaten my meals upon it—to have slept upon it! Night nor day should I have quitted it! Fool that I have been! I have been rightly served—rightly served! And yet it is hard upon me, an old man, to lose all I held dear—very hard!" And falling upon his knees, with his hands clasped together, beside the vacant chest, he wept aloud.

This paroxysm of rage and grief having subsided, he again rose and descended to the parlour, where he found Mrs. Clinton anxiously waiting his reappearance. She instantly divined what had happened, and retreated before him as he advanced, almost fearing from his looks that he would do her a violence. Shaking his clenched hand, and foaming at the mouth, he attempted to discharge a volley of imprecations against her; but rage took away the power of speech, and he stood gesticulating and shaking before her,—a frightful and pitiable spectacle.

"For Heaven's sake, sir, compose yourself," she cried, "or you will have a fit of some dangerous illness. You terrify me to death."

"I am glad of it," he shrieked. "I have been robbed—the mortgage money is gone—the fourteen thousand pounds. D'ye hear, woman? I've been robbed, I say—robbed!"

"I feared as much," replied Mrs Clinton; "but the robbery cannot have been long effected, for just before you knocked at the door, I heard a window creak, as I thought, in your room."

"You did!" screamed the miser. "And why did you not tell me this before? I might have caught them—might have got back the spoil."

"If you hadn't frightened me so much about Hilda, I should have told you," replied Mrs. Clinton, in a deprecatory tone; "but your violence put it out of my head."

"Hell and fiends!" ejaculated the miser; "what is Hilda—what are fifty daughters compared with my gold? If you had enabled me to recover it, I would have forgiven you all the rest. Don't stand trembling there, fool! but come with me, and let us see whether we can discover any traces of the robbers!"

So saying, he hurried towards a small back door in the passage, the bolts of which were so rusty that he had considerable difficulty in removing them; and this effected, he passed into the garden.

A most miserable and neglected place it was, and almost wholly overgrown with long rank grass, such as is to be seen in some city churchyards. But it had once been prettily laid out, as was proved by the lines of box bordering the flower-beds, and the trellised arbour and green-house. The appearance of the latter made the desolation of the place complete. The glass was removed from the frames, one of the walls had been pulled down, and the bricks and plaster were lying scattered about, together with a heap of broken flower-pots, and a number of worn-out and battered gardening implements; the arbour was covered with the net-like folds of a dead creeper, and the trellis-work was decayed and falling to pieces; the little window, to which access had been gained by the robbers, was on the upper story, and about sixteen feet from the ground. The miser gazed anxiously and inquiringly at it. All the lower windows, including that of the parlour, which he usually occupied, were closely barred, and had evidently not been disturbed. Those in the attics were boarded up; while of the remainder in the first floor, only the small one in question was open.

On examining the ground beneath it he found foot-prints upon the soil and on the crushed grass, and, as far as he could ascertain, two or three persons must have assisted at the robbery. He traced the foot-prints across the garden to a wall about six feet high, at the back of which was a narrow passage, communicating between the adjoining house and the area in the front of Westminster Abbey; and here, from certain indications in the soil, he had no doubt that the depredators had got over. His vociferations while conducting the search brought some of the inmates of the next house into the passage, and they told him they had seen and heard nothing, but begged him to come round and satisfy himself. This he instantly did, and found their representations perfectly correct. The only proof the robbers having made their approach by the passage, rested in the fact of the door being left open. His investigations ended, the miser, who made no remark while conducting them, went back to his own house.

To his surprise, he found that his daughter and Jacob had returned. The latter looked greatly disconcerted, and continued twirling his hat between his fingers, but Hilda advanced towards him.

"I am greatly distressed to hear of your loss, father," she said.

"And to whom am I to attribute it?" he rejoined, bitterly. "If you had remained at home, and Jacob had been on the watch, it would not have happened."

"Perhaps not," she rejoined; "but I am not wholly to blame. It was your unkindness that compelled me to take this step."

"Well, and what does good Abel Beechcroft—kind Abel Beechcroft say?" cried the miser, tauntingly. "What does he advise?—will he receive you?—will he adopt you?—will he give you to his nephew Randulph? He is welcome to do so if he pleases."

"Do not let us speak on this subject now, father," rejoined Hilda; "you have too much upon your mind without it. I pray you to believe that I have been guilty of no wilful disobedience towards you."

"Pshaw!" cried the miser, contemptuously; "I will not have my patience abused by such idle assertions. But, as you say, we will discuss the matter at another time. Answer me only one question—have you seen Randulph Crew?"

"I have," replied Hilda, blushing deeply.

"At his uncle's?" demanded the miser.

"No," she rejoined; "but in a situation, and under circumstances that, if I had entertained the slightest regard for him, would have effectually obliterated it."

"We saw your nephew at the same time, sir," interposed Jacob, who had now regained his self-possession.

"Where did you see him?" asked the miser.

"At the Folly on the Thames," replied Jacob. "He was not in the miserable dress he wore on his visit to you, but in a fine suit and handsome peruke. I told you he was playin' you false; and if I am not deceived, he was on good terms with the gay lady to whom Mr. Randulph Crew was payin' attention, and of whom Miss Hilda is so jealous!"

"Jacob!" she exclaimed, again colouring.

"Nay, no offence, miss," he returned; "but you know it is the truth."

"What idle story is this?" exclaimed the miser, incredulously.

Jacob's reply was cut short by a knock at the door.

"Are you at home, sir?" he asked.

"Yes—yes!" replied the miser; "in my present frame of mind I care not whom I see."

Jacob then departed, and in a few seconds returned, with a countenance fraught with vexation and surprise, ushering in Diggs and Philip Frewin. The latter was dressed in the same miserable suit, the same old wig, and the same old shoes with high quarters, that he had worn on the preceding day. The visitors appeared struck with the embarrassed air of the miser and his family, and Diggs inquired the cause of it.

"Before I explain what has happened to myself, Mr. Diggs," said Scarve, "I think it right to state that my servant, Jacob Post, declares he saw my nephew on board the Folly on the Thames this morning, and very differently dressed from what he is at present."

"I saw him, not two hours ago," replied Jacob.

"Two hours ago must have been half-past two," rejoined Diggs, taking out his watch, "and at that time he was with me. You must, therefore, be mistaken, my good friend."

"I am quite at a loss to conceive what Jacob can mean," said Philip, "but I certainly was with Mr. Diggs at the time specified, as he has just stated."

"You know well enough what I mean, Mr. Philip," rejoined Jacob, gruffly—"you know you're deceivin' your uncle."

Mr. Diggs smiled at the miser, and shrugged his shoulders.

"They're in league together, sir," said Jacob, "if you don't believe me, ask Miss Hilda if she didn't see him."

"I certainly thought I saw Philip," said Hilda, "but I confess I was too much confused at the time to observe accurately."

"May I ask how my fair cousin chanced to be in a situation to make such observations?" inquired Philip.

"Ay, you may well ask that?" added the miser.

"It can matter little why I was there," replied Hilda; "nor do I conceive myself called upon to answer the question."

"I can give you no explanation, Philip," said Scarve, "for I have received none myself. My daughter has chosen to go out without leave during my absence, and Jacob has accompanied her. I profess myself wholly in the dark as to where she has been."

"That is not literally true, father," replied Hilda, "for I have already admitted that I have been to Mr. Abel Beechcroft, and I may now add," she continued, looking at Philip, "that I have called upon Mrs. Verral, in Fenchurch-street."

"Mrs. Verral!" exclaimed Philip, starting.

"Ay, you may well look surprised and dismayed, sir," pursued Hilda; "you anticipate what is to follow. She has made your real character and circumstances known to me. Father, your nephew is not more false in outward appearance than in reality.

He is a ruined man, seeking an alliance with me only to repair his broken fortunes."

"It is necessary for me now to interpose, Miss Scarve," said Diggs. "No one can be better acquainted with your cousin's affairs than I am; and so far from being a ruined man, or in the slightest degree embarrassed, he is at this moment worth half a million of money."

"Do you hear that?" cried the miser, triumphantly.

"I shall not speak of myself," said Philip.

"No, you had better not," interrupted Jacob.

"Peace, sirrah!" cried the miser; "there is no need of assertions, nephew. I am quite satisfied. But what brings you here?"

"We come to conclude the marriage settlement, sir," rejoined Diggs. "My client is anxious to expedite the match."

"I regret to tell you a very unfortunate accident has just occurred, which will prevent my giving the sum I intended," said the miser.

"How so, sir?" cried the attorney, with a disappointed look.

"That's right, sir," said Jacob, drawing near his master; and twitching his coat tail, he whispered in his ear, "Touch 'em up on that."

"Be quiet, sirrah!" cried the miser, aloud. "To put the matter at rest," he added to the attorney, "I must inform you, that during my absence I have been plundered of the whole of the large sum paid me yesterday."

"What!" exclaimed Philip, turning very pale, "the fourteen thousand pounds?"

Mr. Scarve replied in the affirmative.

"God bless me! my dear sir, you don't say so?" cried Diggs.

"Yes I do," rejoined the miser; "every jot of it is gone."

"What an unheard-of robbery!" exclaimed the attorney—"but it must be inquired into. When did it happen—and how? Pray give me all the particulars. I must set the officers to work immediately."

"No," replied the miser, mournfully—"it is gone, and employing thief-takers and constables wont bring it back again, but, on the contrary, will involve further loss of money, as well as of time and patience. I meant to give it to my daughter on her marriage. But as I have lost it, she must go without a portion?"

"Without a portion, Mr. Scarve!" exclaimed Diggs. "The loss of fourteen thousand pounds is heavy, it is true, but it falls more lightly upon you than it would on most men. You have still wealth sufficient to make the settlement you proposed upon your daughter without feeling it."

"Pardon me, Mr. Diggs," returned the miser, "I proposed to give my daughter a particular sum of money, which I had in contemplation at the time of making the offer. Of this I have been feloniously deprived, and it is no longer in my power to fulfil my agreement."

"Well, my dear uncle," said Philip, "sooner than ——"

"I know what your generosity prompts you to say, Mr. Frewin," interrupted Diggs; "but I have a duty to you as well as to my worthy client and friend, Mr. Scarve, and I must say, that if he departs from his word, on the present plea, I cannot advise you to proceed with the match."

"I have not the money to give, Philip," said the miser, piteously.

"Nay, uncle, if you put it on that footing, I myself must retract," rejoined Philip. "I am not ignorant of your wealth."

"Nobody doubts it," remarked Jacob, "or you wouldn't be so urgent for the match. Stick to your determination, sir," he added to his master. "Don't give your daughter anything, and you'll soon see how the gentleman will hang fire."

"Leave the room, sirrah!" cried the miser, angrily. And Jacob moved towards the door, but he did not go out.

"Before I am disposed of in this way, father, and without my own consent," said Hilda, "I must beg that Mr. Philip Frewin's character may be fully investigated; that you will hear what I have to say on the subject; and what Mrs. Verral has to say."

"I will hear nothing!" cried the miser, furiously. "You are acting under the advice of Abel Beechcroft. Mrs. Verral is a friend of his. He sent you to her. Can you deny it?"

"I cannot," replied Hilda.

"Mrs. Verral may malign me as much as she thinks fit," said Philip, boldly. "But fortunately my character stands on too firm a basis to be shaken by a malicious woman's aspersions. I must entreat, sir," he added, turning, with an appearance of candour, towards his uncle, "that you will investigate this matter; that you will not put faith in Mr. Abel Beechcroft's assertions, or in those of Mrs. Verral; but inquire among my friends—among those who know me well—as to how I stand. It is, perhaps, useless to refer to Mr. Diggs."

"Not at all," replied the miser. "As I said before, I am quite satisfied with his assurance."

"And I can give it most heartily, sir," replied the attorney. "Excepting yourself, I do not know a more careful, prudent, sagacious man than my client, Mr. Philip Frewin. I feel called upon, by these attacks on his character, to say thus much for him. And I can do what his calumniators cannot—I can give you proof of what I assert. I suspect, sir, you will find when you look into the matter, that some scheme is hatching against you."

"To be sure he will," cried Jacob; "and he will find out who is hatchin' it too!"

"Nephew," said the miser, taking Philip's hand, "I am quite satisfied of the rectitude of your conduct, and the stability of your position."

"Father," cried Hilda, "you are deceived. You are the dupe of a designer."

But the miser turned a deaf ear to her, and exchanged a few words in a low tone with Philip and Diggs. Soon afterwards, as they took their departure, he accompanied them to the street-door, and fastened it after them.

CHAPTER XVI.

LADY BRABAZON DEPOSITS HER DIAMONDS WITH THE MISER—GALLANTRY OF THE LATTER—HE DISCOVERS THE CONTRIVER OF THE ROBBERY OF THE MORTGAGE MONEY.

When Mr. Scarve returned, the parlour was vacant,—Hilda and her aunt having retired to their own room, and Jacob having descended to the cellar to get out of the way. The miser mounted to the ladies' room, and seeing the key in the door, turned it, and took it out. This done, he sat down in his chair, and remained for nearly two hours pondering on the events of the day. He was still wrapped in painful meditation, when a loud knock was heard without. Before an answer could be returned, the summons was repeated; the street-door was opened by Jacob, footsteps resounded along the passage, and, as the miser raised his head in surprise, Lady Brabazon was announced. It is quite certain, that if Mr. Scarve had been consulted, he would have refused her ladyship admittance. But as it was not now in his power to deny himself, he rose with the best grace he could assume to receive her. Jacob received a nod, and withdrew.

"Well, Mr. Scarve," said Lady Brabazon, "I am come to know whether I can have the four thousand pounds to-night."

"Impossible, your ladyship—impossible!" replied the miser. "If you will pay me twice the interest agreed upon—it cannot be. I have suffered a very heavy loss to-day—a very heavy loss, indeed."

"Poh—poh! that is always the way with you usurers," replied Lady Brabazon. "You are always suffering some heavy loss. But you don't expect me to believe you. You take a great deal too good care of your money to lose it. I must have a thousand pounds for a special purpose to-night. And if you will not let me have the four thousand, I must have the smaller amount, and on the security of these jewels." And she produced a case of diamonds. "You see," she added, displaying them, "they are worth nearly double the amount."

"They are very brilliant," replied the miser, gazing at them with the eye of a connoisseur. "But I cannot lend your ladyship the money."

"Mr. Scarve," said Lady Brabazon, "I have a debt to pay to-night, and if I do not discharge it, my character will be entirely lost."

"Your ladyship's character as a punctual paymaster will scarcely suffer by the delay of a night," said Scarve, drily.

"But this is a debt of honour!" rejoined Lady Brabazon. "I will redeem my jewels in less than a week."

"Oh, if it is a debt of honour, that is quite another thing," said the miser. "This is certainly a magnificent set of diamonds. Your ladyship must look vastly well in them. Favour me by putting them on."

"Certainly, Mr. Scarve, if you desire it," replied Lady Brabazon, condescendingly.

"I don't know which to admire most—your ladyship or the diamonds," observed the miser, gallantly.

"The old fool has fallen in love with me," thought Lady Brabazon; "I must improve the advantage I have gained. You are very complaisant, Mr. Scarve," she added, aloud, and with one of her bewitching smiles—a smile which, in her younger days, had never failed of execution.

"It would be strange if I were not, to so fascinating a person as your ladyship," replied the miser, with a strange leer, that sat very ill on his withered features.

Lady Brabazon cast down her eyes.

"I almost forget what brought me hither," she observed, after a slight pause, during which she hoped the miser would follow up his gallant commencement.

"A proof it cannot be of great importance," rejoined Scarve; "but your ladyship has asked me a favour, and I will beg one in return. I have been disappointed in my dearest expectations of late. My daughter will not marry according to my wishes. What shall I do? I am too old to marry again."

"Scarcely," replied her ladyship, trying to force a blush, but decidedly failing in the attempt.

"I will put a case," continued the miser, "merely for consideration. Suppose I were to offer myself to a person of your ladyship's rank—and in your ladyship's position. What sort of reception should I be likely to meet with?"

"That, I should say, would depend entirely upon the settlement you proposed to make, Mr. Scarve," replied Lady Brabazon, in a business-like tone. "You are reported to be immensely rich. You have some misunderstanding with your daughter, you say—which I can readily conceive—daughters are so very unmanageable—there is my Clementina, for instance, the sweetest temper in the world, but she gives me an infinity of trouble.

But, as I was saying, you are immensely rich—money is no object to you; if, therefore, you were to settle upon a lady in my position somewhere about a hundred thousand pounds—but not less—I think—mind, I only think—for I offer a very hasty and ill-considered opinion—I think, however, she might be induced to accept you."

"Rather a large sum to pay for a wife at my time of life, your ladyship," observed the miser, drily.

"Not a fraction more than would be required, believe me, my good sir," replied Lady Brabazon.

"Then I must abandon any views I may have entertained of an exalted alliance," sighed the miser. "But suppose we take another view of the case. Perhaps, for a hundredth part of the sum, there would be no necessity for marriage at all."

"That is a view of the case which I cannot for a moment contemplate, Mr. Scarve," said her ladyship, with a glance of indignation. "Allow me to remind you that I came here on business."

"True," replied the miser, in some confusion. "These diamonds are certainly very brilliant. Your ladyship shall have the sum you require upon them. And we will talk about the other matters at another time."

With this, he unlocked the little chest beneath the table, and producing a small tin cash-box, took from it a rouleau of goldsmiths' notes, counted them, and delivered them to her ladyship.

Lady Brabazon twisted the notes carelessly between her fingers, and then placed them in her bag; after which she divested herself of the diamonds, gave them to the miser, and at the same time, as if to show she was not offended with him beyond the possibility of reconciliation, she accorded him her snow-white hand, which he pressed to his lips. This ceremony performed, he ushered her to the street door, where her carriage was waiting, and bowed her to its steps.

"Mr. Villiers's," said Lady Brabazon to the footman, as he closed the door. "The odious wretch!" she added to herself, "to dare to make such a proposal to me! However, I have got the money."

As the miser returned to the parlour, he rubbed his skinny hands together, and muttered laughingly to himself—"So she affects virtuous indignation, as if I didn't know she only wants the money for her lover, Beau Villiers. But I will try her yet more strongly She is certainly a fine woman—a very fine woman. What do you want, sirrah?" he added, raising his eyes, and perceiving Jacob standing before him.

"Don't you mean to take some steps about this robbery?" asked the porter.

"What's that to you, rascal?" rejoined the miser, angrily. "You can watch the stable when the steed's stolen, can you? You shall quit my service in a week."

"No, I wont," replied Jacob, doggedly. "This mornin', I'd have quitted you with pleasure, but now I'm sorry for you. You've been unfortunate, and I wont go."

"Curse your pity!" cried the miser. "I wont be plagued with you any longer."

"You're not in a fit condition to judge for yourself just now," returned Jacob. "Think it over about discharging me when you're calmer. I'm sorry for you, I tell you—that is, I'm sorry for your loss, though I hope it may soften your ob*du*rate heart towards your daughter. If you do turn me away, I hope you'll give me a recommendation to Mr. Abel Beechcroft. Ah! his is a place worth livin' in. It would do you good to see the dinner I sat down to to-day with the servants. There was a cold sir*line* of beef, a hot potato-pie, a piece of pickled pork, and as much strong ale as I chose to drink."

"Peace, sirrah!" cried Scarve. "What satisfaction can it be to me to hear how a profuse gentleman wastes his substance on a set of thankless hirelings?"

"They're not thankless," rejoined Jacob, "they all love him, and speak well of him."

"And what is their opinion worth?" sneered Scarve. "Full pockets are better than the empty praises of a set of idle, pampered menials."

"I don't think so," replied Jacob; "and I only wish I was such a pampered menial as Mr. Jukes."

"Well, I'll recommend you to Mr. Beechcroft, with all my heart," rejoined Scarve; "and I wish he may take you, for I couldn't do him a greater disservice. You'll soon eat him out of house and home. But come with me to my room."

And leading the way up stairs, he pointed to the open window and the empty chest, asking Jacob with a bitter sneer, "Whether he could make anything of them?"

Jacob gazed curiously at the window for some time without offering a remark, and then proceeded to examine the chamber. All at once, his eye alighted upon a small piece of paper, which he instantly picked up. A few lines were traced upon it in pencil, but before he could ascertain their import, the paper was snatched from him by his master, who read as follows:—"It must be done this morning. The money is in a chest in the dressing-room, which is accessible from the little garden at the back of the house. You can reach the garden by a small entry opening upon the area in front of the abbey. A rope ladder will do the rest. Alarm no one if you can help it; and, above all, use no violence, whatever may happen. If you are discovered, I will take care no harm befals you." No signature was attached to this mysterious document, neither was it directed. The upper part of it had likewise been torn off.

"You had better let me take the letter to Tom Blee the thieftaker," said Jacob. "He'll make something of it, I'll warrant you."

"No," replied the miser, who remained gazing upon the paper, apparently wrapped in thought; "I shall stir no further in the matter."

"Well, if I was disposed to turn housebreaker," rejoined Jacob "you're just the person I'd begin business with. I should feel sure of gettin' off easy."

The miser raised his eyes, and fixed them sternly on him—

"Take care what you say, Jacob," he remarked. "Many a man has been hanged for lighter words than you have just uttered."

He then pointed to the door, and Jacob withdrew. After remaining by himself nearly an hour, he prepared to go down stairs. As he passed his daughter's chamber, he heard her talking to her aunt, and put his hand into his pocket to see that the key was safe. Repairing to the parlour, he called to Jacob to bring him something to eat. A little cold meat and bread were placed before him by the porter, of which he partook very sparingly, although he had eaten nothing since the morning, and quenched his thirst with a glass of water. The eatables removed, he took out his account book, and some other papers, and began to occupy himself with them. About eight o'clock another knock was heard at the door, and Jacob came to tell him Mr. Cordwell Firebras was without, having come by appointment to see him.

"Admit him," replied the miser.

Thus empowered, Jacob departed, and presently afterwards returned with the individual in question.

"I am punctual, you see, Mr. Scarve," said Firebras, with a smile, as he entered the room.

"You are, sir," replied the miser, gravely. And while his visitor threw himself into a chair, he got up to ascertain that Jacob descended into the cellar.

"And now, Mr. Scarve," said Firebras, "let us proceed at once to business. I conclude you have got the five thousand pounds for me."

The miser shook his head, and proceeded to detail the robbery that had taken place in his house. Firebras heard the narration with a smile of incredulity.

"This story may do well for some persons, Mr. Scarve," he said, at its close; "but I am too old a hand to be duped by it. You had better confess at once, and frankly, that you have changed your mind, and will not advance the money."

"I have already explained the cause of my inability to do so," rejoined the miser, with stern significance; "and it must suffice."

"Well, sir," cried Firebras, "you have grievously disappointed me,—and you will disappoint others as grievously. You know that if the good cause prospers, you will have a hundred per cent. for your money—and you profess to wish it well. I *must* have a thousand pounds to-night."

"That, I may possibly manage," rejoined Scarve; "but I cannot give it to you in cash. Lady Brabazon has just deposited her jewels with me for that amount."

"Oh! you can lend her ladyship money, though you refuse it to me," returned Firebras, reproachfully. "Your admiration of the fair sex is greater than your devotion to the good cause, I perceive. But I must put up with the jewels, since better may not be."

"Here they are," replied Scarve, producing the case. "You must give me a receipt for them."

"Willingly," said Firebras, taking up a pen. "I shall put them down as a thousand pounds in money."

"You must put them down as fifteen hundred," cried the miser, hastily. "I am not to run all this risk for nothing."

"Extortioner!" exclaimed Firebras, between his teeth. "However, it shall be as you will. King James the Third is your debtor for fifteen hundred pounds. There."

"How very strange!" ejaculated the miser, with well-feigned surprise, as he took the memorandum. "Your writing is exactly like that of a letter I found in my closet just now, and which was evidently dropped by one of the robbers."

"A letter!" exclaimed Firebras, uneasily. "Have you got it? Let me look at it."

The miser produced the scrap of paper, and placed the memorandum beside it. The handwriting was precisely similar in both cases.

"That handwriting is rather like mine, undoubtedly," said Firebras, with the most perfect composure. "But do you mean to say this paper was found in the room where the robbery was committed?"

"It was found there by Jacob," rejoined the miser. "Shall I call him to add his testimony to mine?"

"Oh, by no means!" replied Firebras. "Well, Mr. Scarve, as I may be considered the indirect means of your losing this money, I will take care, if the good cause prospers, that the amount is made up to you."

"You had better confess at once that you caused it to be taken," said the miser.

"You are resolved I shall criminate myself," replied Firebras, laughing—"but I wont do so. I've no doubt, however, your money is in good hands."

"Then I am satisfied," rejoined Scarve. "Now, mark me, Mr. Firebras. In the event you have named, I shall expect that fourteen thousand pounds to produce me twenty thousand. Give me a memorandum to that effect. Nay, you can write it at the back of the letter."

Firebras smiled, and complied, and Mr. Scarve smiled, too, as he compared the memorandum with the writing on the other side of the paper. And this was all that passed on the subject.

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. CRIPPS'S ALARMING INTELLIGENCE—RANDULPH'S INTRODUCTION TO THE JACOBITE CLUB—SIR NORFOLK SALUSBURY AND FATHER VERSELYN—THE TREASONABLE TOAST—DANGEROUS POSITION OF RANDULPH—HIS FIRMNESS—PUNCTILIOUSNESS OF SIR NORFOLK SALUSBURY.

Cordwell Firebras, on quitting the Little Sanctuary, bent his steps towards Tothill-street. He was laughing to himself, probably at what had just occurred, when, hearing quick footsteps behind him, he turned, and beheld Mr. Crackenthorpe Cripps, The valet's looks so much alarmed him, that he instantly stopped, and inquired what was the matter.

"Oh, lud! I'm quite out of breath," gasped Mr. Cripps, putting one hand affectedly to his side, while with the other he held a scented handkerchief to his nose.

"Speak, sirrah! and don't keep me in suspense!" cried Firebras—"what's the matter, I say?"

"Danger—a dungeon—death on the scaffold is the matter," replied Mr. Cripps. "You have betrayed yourself most indiscreetly, Mr. Firebras—you have, 'pon rep!"

"In what way?" demanded the other, uneasily.

"Your conversation with Mr. Randulph Crew, in the cloisters yonder, has been overheard," returned Mr. Cripps; "yes, you may well start, sir—I repeat, it was overheard by Peter Pokerich, the barber, and his sweetheart, Thomasine Deacle, the mercer's fair daughter. The little fellow was planning how to make the most of the discovery, when fortunately I chanced to call upon him, and with great ingenuity—though I say it—contrived to throw dust in his eyes, as he has done into those of so many of his customers. Ha! ha!"

"This is awkward," said Firebras, thoughtfully. "Will the barber join us, think you? And if so, can he be trusted?"

"Hum!" exclaimed Mr. Cripps, throwing himself into a musing posture; "that requires consideration. I think I might manage him. But I must be paid for the service, Mr. Firebras—well paid, sir."

"Unquestionably," returned the other. "Your reward shall always be in proportion to your utility."

"Then there's the fair Thomasine," pursued Mr. Cripps. "She must be silenced, too. Egad, I'll make love to her. But I must be paid for that likewise."

"Surely the lady will be reward enough," laughed Firebras.

"On the contrary, I shall have her on my hands," replied Mr. Cripps. "But I wont demand more than my due, sir,—'pon rep! Allow me to offer you a pinch of snuff. I shall now go back to the barber, and, when matters are settled, you may expect me at the Rose and Crown." And raising his hat, and making a profound bow, he strutted off.

Ruminating on the intelligence he had received, Cordwell Firebras proceeded to Petty France, where he struck off on the right into Gardiner's-street, and entered the Rose and Crown. Nodding familiarly to the landlord, who came from the bar to greet him, he marched on towards a back room, where Randulph was seated.

"I am sorry to have quitted you so long, my dear young friend," he said; "but I have been detained by Mr. Scarve."

"Have you seen Hilda?" asked the young man.

"No," replied Firebras; "but I intimated to her father that I had a good match in view for her; and that I should speak to him on the subject to-morrow."

Further conversation was interrupted by the landlord, who ushered in Sir Bulkeley Price. The Welsh baronet hurried forward, holding out both his hands towards Firebras; but he started, and looked exceedingly surprised on beholding Randulph.

"I need not present my young friend, Mr. Randulph Crew, to you, Sir Bulkeley," said Firebras; "for I believe—nay, indeed, I know—you are already acquainted with him."

"I have passed a great part of the morning with Mr. Crew," said Sir Bulkeley, bowing; "but I was not aware he belonged to our party. I am extremely glad to find it so."

Before Randulph could reply, the door again opened, and a gaunt, tall personage entered the room, who was announced by the host as Sir Norfolk Salusbury. Never had Randulph seen so extraordinary a figure as that now presented to his gaze. Sir Norfolk was more than six feet high, with a very meagre, but withal muscular-looking frame, and large, prominent features. He held himself so exceedingly erect, that he seemed in imminent danger of falling backwards. He was dressed in a cinnamon-coloured coat of rather antiquated fashion, a scarlet waistcoat edged with gold, black velvet breeches, and white silk hose. He had large lace ruffles at his wrists, and a flowing lace frill at his breast. His well-powdered peruke was terminated by a long thick queue, which, by its perpendicular descent, showed how much the small of his back was taken in. His features were rather harsh, and rigid as if carved in mahogany, nor did they seem capable of being unbent by a smile. His eyes were gray and cat-like, and surmounted by black bushy brows. But it was not so much his dress, his features, or his figure, that attracted attention, as his extraordinarily formal deportment. No Spanish hidalgo ever moved with greater solemnity and dignity. His limbs creaked like rusty hinges, and there was something in his whole air and manner that irresistibly reminded Randulph of Don Quixote.

"Welcome, Sir Norfolk," exclaimed Cordwell Firebras, advancing towards him; "allow me to present my young friend, Mr. Randulph Crew, to you."

"I am happy in the acquaintance of the representative of so ancient a name," returned Sir Norfolk, bowing stiffly. "Eum cognoscere gaudeo. -- Sir Bulkeley Price, I salute you. It did not enter into my expectations to meet you. I conceived you were still montivagous and eremetical in the principality."

"I arrived yesterday, Sir Norfolk," said Sir Bulkeley, advancing towards him, and shaking him by the hand. "How long have you been in town?"

"My sojourn in the capital hath not as yet exceeded the septimanal limit," replied Sir Norfolk.

"In plain English, you have not been here more than a week," laughed Sir Bulkeley. "But I am as much surprised to see you as you can be to see me."

"My advent was inopinate and repent, Sir Bulkeley," rejoined Sir Norfolk. "Affairs of state drew me hither."

Again the door opened, and two grave-looking personages, announced as Father Verselyn and Mr. Travers, were ushered in. Father Verselyn, the foremost of these, was a tall, thin, middle-aged man, with a dark complexion, and a sinister and perfidious expression of countenance. He was habited like a layman,—indeed, it would not have been safe, from the laws then in force against Romish priests, to appear in any other dress,—in a sober-coloured suit, a full-bottomed black wig, which he wore without powder, and spectacles. Mr. Travers was a short, square-built, broad-faced person, and had a searching, severe look. He was likewise very plainly attired, but had nevertheless the appearance of a person of condition.

Courteous greetings were interchanged by the new comers and the others; and Randulph was secretly entertained by the formality with which Sir Norfolk returned their salutations. He was, in turn, introduced to the strangers; but could scarcely repress the dislike with which Father Verselyn inspired him. The party then broke up into little groups, and much whispered conversation ensued, in which Randulph took no part. In about a quarter of an hour, the landlord entered the room, and, bowing to the company, said, "I believe, gentlemen, you are all assembled; the room up stairs is ready, if you are disposed to adjourn to it."

The proposition being assented to, the landlord threw open the door, and a slight contest occurred between the two baronets as to which should offer the other precedence.

"I præ, Sir Bulkeley," said Sir Norfolk; "I will scale the staircase after you."

Thus exhorted, Sir Bulkeley, who thought it good breeding not to dispute a point of needless ceremony, went on. Sir Norfolk marched after him with majestic steps, and the rest of the party followed. The landlord ushered them into a large room, lighted by a chandelier suspended from the ceiling, in the centre of which was a circular table covered with bottles and glasses. Having hung up their hats against the wall, the company sat down, and a few bumpers went briskly round. While they were thus carousing, a tap was heard at the door, and the landlord, opening a reconnoitring hole within it, spoke to some one without. He next proceeded to convey the information he had received, in a low tone, to Cordwell Firebras, who immediately said aloud, "Oh, yes, admit him by all means. Gentlemen, a new brother!"

The door was then opened, and Randulph recognised in the gaily-attired, self-possessed coxcomb who was admitted, Mr. Crackenthorpe Cripps.

"Take a glass of wine, Mr. Cripps," said Firebras, filling a bumper, and handing it to the new comer. "It is Beau Villiers's chief valet," he added, in an under tone, to Sir Norfolk, who had made a polite though formal bow to the stranger.

"What!" exclaimed Sir Norfolk, almost shuddering at the inadvertence he had committed; "a waiting-man in such costly and nitid attire. Why, his master, the Petronius Arbiter of the day, can scarcely be more studiously refined in the taste and style of the vestments wherewith he adorneth his person."

"Not a whit so," laughed Firebras; "the only difference between them is, that Beau Cripps wears in May the coat which Beau Villiers has worn in April."

"Mehercle!" exclaimed Sir Norfolk. "Such prodigality almost exceedeth belief."

"Landlord, it is time!" cried Father Verselyn, who performed the part of chairman, and occupied the principal seat.

"I am ready, your reverence," replied the landlord. And he forthwith proceeded to a cupboard, from which he produced a large china bowl, apparently filled with punch, and placed it with great care and solemnity in the centre of the table.

"Why, it is water," exclaimed Randulph, gazing at the clear lymph, with which, on nearer inspection, he perceived the bowl was filled.

"To be sure!" cried Firebras; "and we are about to drink the king's health—*over the water* And now, gentlemen," he continued, filling Randulph's glass and his own, "fill, I pray you, to the brim."

"I have filled, even to the summit of the vase," said Sir Norfolk, rising and holding up his glass.

"And I," cried Sir Bulkeley, likewise rising.

"And I," added the landlord, who stood next to the last-named baronet, and was allowed to join in the ceremony.

"And I—and I," chimed Mr. Travers and the valet.

"Then give the word, my son," said Verselyn, addressing Firebras.

"With the greatest pleasure, father," replied Cordwell. And he held his glass over the bowl, while his example was imitated by all the others except Randulph. "Here is the king's health 'over the water.' Why don't you do as we do?" he added, turning to Randulph.

"Ay, stretch forth your arm over the scyphus, young gentleman," cried Sir Norfolk, pointing to the bowl.

"You *must* drink the toast—it's the rule of the club," added Sir Bulkeley.

"It is a rule I cannot subscribe to," replied Randulph.

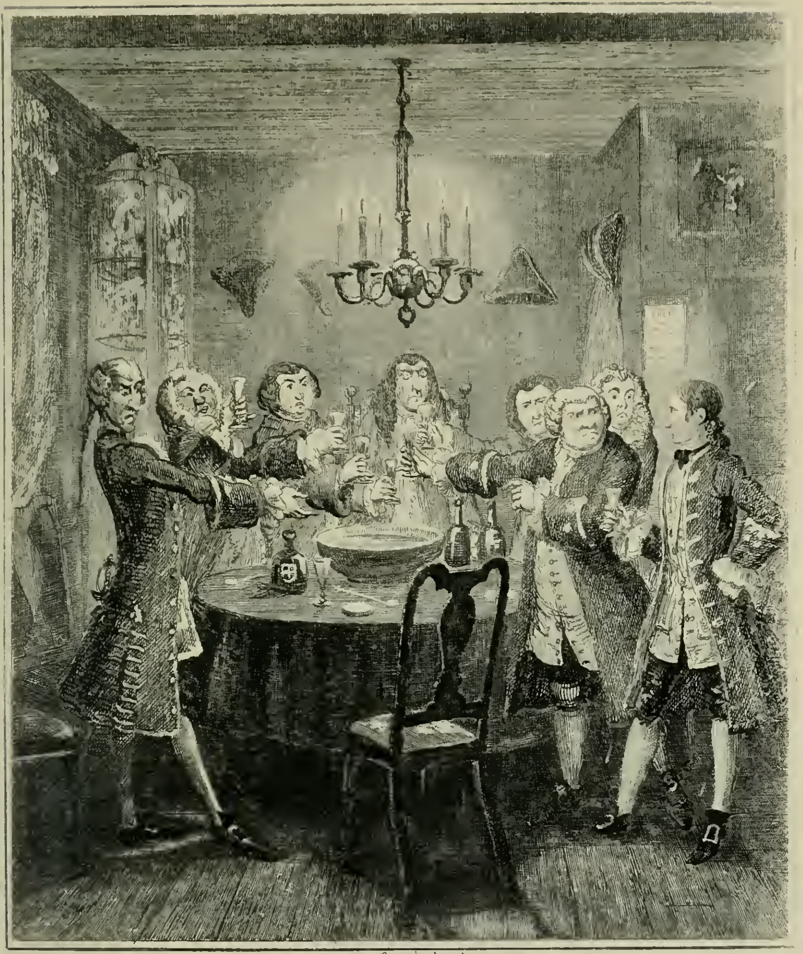
"How!—am I mistaken in you, young man?" said Firebras, regarding him menacingly.

"Do as they bid you, or you'll have your throat cut, 'pon rep!" whispered Mr. Cripps, popping his head over Firebras's shoulder.

"Will you drink the toast, or not?" demanded Firebras, fiercely.

"I will not!" replied Randulph, firmly. "It is treasonable, and I refuse it."

Randulph's bold declaration had well nigh cost him dear. Cries of "spy!" "traitor!" "Hanoverian!" "down with him!" resounded on all sides; the landlord rushed to the door, and placed his back against it, to prevent any attempt at egress in that way; while Sir Norfolk Salusbury, plucking his long blade from its sheath, and making it whistle over his head, kicked a chair that stood between him and the young man out of the way, and bade him, in a stern tone, defend himself. The confusion was increased by the vociferations of Mr. Cripps, and by an accident caused by Sir Bulkeley Price, who, in hurrying round the table, contrived to entangle himself in the cover, and dragging it off, precipitated the bottles and glasses to the ground, drenching the lower limbs of his brother baronet in the contents of the fractured bowl. The only two persons apparently unmoved in the midst of this uproar were its author and Cordwell Firebras. The latter made no hostile display, and did not even alter his position, but kept his eye steadily fixed upon Randulph, as if anxious to observe the effect of the incident upon him. The young man maintained his firmness throughout. He retreated a few steps towards the wall, and put himself in a posture of defence. The nearest of his antagonists was Sir Norfolk Salusbury; but seeing the others press forward, the chivalrous Welsh baronet declined commencing the attack.



George Cruikshank

Randulph refusing to drink the Kings health over the water

"Singulatim!—one at a time, Mr. Travers," he cried. "Ne Hercules contra duos. It shall never be said that any man, however unworthy of fair treatment, fought against odds in the presence of a descendant of Adam de Salzburg. Stand aside, therefore, sir,—and you, Father Verselyn,—and leave him to me, or I must relinquish the right of combat, which I have in some measure acquired, as being the first to claim it, to you."

"Let the young man swear to keep silence touching all he has seen and heard, or he shall not quit this room alive," rejoined Travers.

"Trust him not—trust him not!" cried Father Verselyn; "his oath will not bind him. Fall upon him altogether, and slay him! That is the only way to insure his silence and our safety. I will absolve you of his blood. The imminence of the danger justifies the deed."

"Proh pudor!" cried Sir Norfolk, sternly. "That would be trucidation dedecorous and ignave; neither can I stand by and see it done."

"Nor I," cried Sir Bulkeley, who had by this time recovered from the embarrassment occasioned by the accident. "I disapprove of Father Verselyn's counsel entirely. Let us hear what the young man has to say. I will question him."

"Haudquàquam, Sir Bulkeley," replied the other, gravely. "I gave you precedence on a recent occasion, but I cannot do so on the present. I claim this young man as my own,—to interrogate, to fight, and, perchance, to slay him."

"Fight him as much as you please, Sir Norfolk, and slay him if you think proper,—or can," rejoined Sir Bulkeley, angrily; "but you shall not prevent my speaking to him."

"Sir Bulkeley Price," returned Sir Norfolk, raising his crane neck to its utmost height, "I pray you not to interfere between me and Mr. Crew, otherwise—"

"Well, Sir Norfolk, and what then?" cried the other, his hot Welsh blood mounting to his cheeks, and empurpling them more deeply than usual. "What then, Sir Norfolk?"

"I shall be compelled to make you render me reason for it," replied the other, sternly.

Cordwell Firebras now thought it time to interfere.

"Gentlemen," he said, advancing towards them, "we have plenty of other quarrels to settle without disputing among ourselves. I brought Mr. Randulph Crew here, and will be responsible for his silence."

"What saith the young man?" demanded Sir Norfolk. "If he will oppignerate his word for taciturnity, I will take it."

"So will I," added Sir Bulkeley.

"I thank you for your good opinion of me, gentlemen," returned Randulph. "I have been, almost unwittingly, a party to your counsels, and ought perhaps to have declared my sentiments sooner; but I hoped the meeting would pass off without rendering any such avowal necessary, in which case, though I certainly should never have joined your club again, the secret of its existence would have rested in my own bosom,—as it will now if I am suffered to depart. I could not avoid expressing my disapproval of a toast, which in common with every loyal subject of King George the Second, I hold to be treasonable."

"You cannot be the subject of a usurper, young man," said Firebras. "Your allegiance to King James the Third is unalienable."

"Compel him to avow allegiance to his rightful sovereign, Mr. Firebras," interposed Father Verselyn.

"I will sooner lay down my life than comply," cried Randulph, resolutely.

Firebras looked slightly disconcerted; and Sir Norfolk, who had lowered the point of his sword, again raised it.

"It is in vain to reason with him, my son," whispered Verselyn. "Our safety demands his destruction. If he goes hence we are denounced; and an irreparable injury will be done to the good cause."

"I have promised him safe-conduct, father," rejoined Firebras; "and, at all risks, I will keep my word. Mr. Randulph Crew, you are at liberty to depart. You give up all hopes of the miser's daughter?" he added, in a deep whisper.

"I must if she is only to be purchased in this way," replied Randulph, in the same tone.

"Take time to consider of it," rejoined Firebras. "I will find means of communicating with you to-morrow. Landlord, attend Mr. Crew to the door."

"You are wrong in letting him go," cried Verselyn. "You will repent this blind confidence. Sir Norfolk, I entreat you to interfere—Sir Bulkeley, I appeal to you."

But they both turned from him and sheathed their swords; while the landlord, having received a sign from Firebras, obeyed his instructions.

As soon as Randulph was gone, Firebras addressed himself to the two baronets:—"I hope no unkindly feeling—none, at least, that cannot easily be set to rights—subsists between you, gentlemen?" he said.

"I shall never quarrel with my good friend, Sir Norfolk, except about a matter of punctilio," replied Sir Bulkeley, who was as easily appeased as roused to anger.

"And I ought never to quarrel with one who knows how to make so handsome a concession as Sir Bulkeley Price," replied Sir Norfolk, with a gracious bow.

"Then the storm has blown over," laughed Firebras. "I feared this more than the other."

A long discussion then took place among the members of the club, as to Randulph's introduction to it, and Firebras was severely censured by Father Verselyn, for admitting the young man without testing his political principles.

"I do not repent what I have done, father," returned Firebras, "because I am satisfied no harm will come of it; and it was an attempt to gain a very useful ally to our cause. He is a brave lad, as his firmness during this affair proved, and it would be a great point to win him over. Nor do I yet despair of doing so."

"I hope we have seen the last of him," muttered Father Verselyn; "and I beg it may be borne in mind that it was against my advice that he was suffered to depart."

Cordwell Firebras darted an angry look at the priest, but he made no reply; and the cloth having been replaced by the landlord and Mr. Cripps, the former proceeded to fetch a fresh supply of flasks and glasses; after which, the company once more gathered round the table, and began to discuss anew their projects.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE JACOBITE CLUB SURPRISED BY THE GUARD—THE FLIGHT AND PURSUIT—MR. CRIPPS'S TREACHERY—HIS REFLECTIONS.

Midnight arrived, and found the party still in deep debate. Suddenly, a quick and continuous knocking was heard at the door.

All instantly started to their feet, gazing at each other in alarm.

"We are betrayed," said Firebras, in a deep whisper.

"We are," replied Father Verselyn; "and by the spy you introduced among us."

"It is false!" cried Firebras, angrily. "But this is no time for dispute. We must provide for our safety. Who is it, landlord?" he cried to the host, who, on the first alarm, had rushed to the door, and opened the reconnoitring-hole within it.

"O lud! we're all lost!" rejoined the landlord, closing the trap-door, and returning to them with scared looks and on tiptoe, as if afraid of the sound of his own footsteps.

"Who is it?—what is it?" demanded Firebras.

"A dozen grenadier guards, headed by their captain and lieutenant, come to search the house," replied the landlord. "They're mounting the stairs now."

"Zounds!" exclaimed Sir Bulkeley, "this is awkward!"

"There is nothing to fear," said Firebras, calmly. "We have plenty of time for flight."

"Yes, you can fly, gentlemen, but I am ruined," exclaimed the landlord. "I can never return to my own dwelling!"

"Pshaw! you shall never be the worse for it," replied Firebras.

"But what will become of me, if I am taken?" cried Mr. Cripps, feigning a look of despair. "I am sure to be the worse for it."

"Silence!" cried Firebras, authoritatively—"Don't you hear them?—they are at the door. Be quick, gentlemen. Not a moment is to be lost."

While this was passing, Father Verselyn hurried to the lower end of the room, and mounting a ladder placed against the wall, passed through a trap-door in the ceiling above it. The landlord, Mr. Cripps, and Mr. Travers, next ascended; then Sir Bulkeley followed; then Sir Norfolk, whose equanimity not even the present danger could disturb; while Firebras brought up the rear.

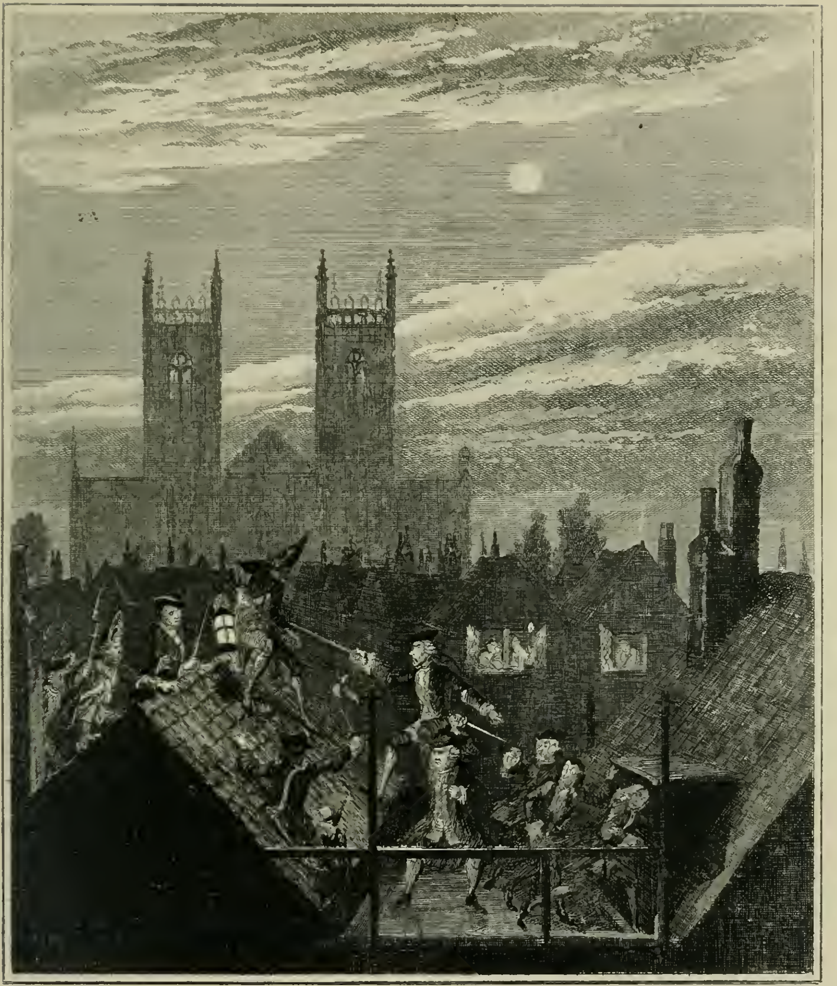
"'Sdeath, Sir Norfolk," cried the latter, as the baronet slowly scaled the steps before him—"move on a little more quickly, or we shall certainly be captured. They're breaking open the door. Don't you hear them?"

"Perfecté," replied Sir Norfolk, coolly. But he did not on that account accelerate his movements.

Knowing it was in vain to remonstrate, Cordwell Firebras waited till Sir Norfolk had worked his long frame through the trap-door, which he did with the utmost deliberation, and then ran up the steps himself, with much more activity than might have been expected from a person so weighty. Just as he was quitting the ladder, the door was burst open with a tremendous crash, and two officers of the guard rushed into the room, sword in hand, followed by a dozen grenadiers armed with muskets, on which bayonets were fixed.

Firebras's first object, on securing a footing on the floor of the garret above, was to try to draw up the ladder, and he was assisted in the endeavour by Sir Norfolk; but their design was frustrated by the foremost officer and a tall grenadier bearing a halbert, both of whom sprang upon the ladder, and kept it down by their joint weight, and all that those above could do was to shut down the trap-door before it could be reached by their foes. A dormer window opened from the garret upon the roof of the house; but an unexpected difficulty had been experienced by the first detachment of fugitives in unfastening it. All ought to have been in readiness for an emergency like the present, and Sir Bulkeley and Mr. Travers bitterly reproached the landlord for his negligence. The poor fellow declared that the mischance was not his fault—that he had taken every possible precaution—and, in fact, had examined the window that very morning, and found it all right.

At length, it was forced back; and all but Sir Norfolk and Firebras got through it. They were detained by the necessity that existed of guarding the trap-door. Unfortunately, there was no bolt on the upper side of it so that they had to stand upon



George Cruikshank

The Jacobite Club pursued by the guard.

it to keep it down, and this plan being discovered by the officer below, he ordered two of his men to thrust their bayonets through the boards, while the tall grenadier tried to prize open the door with his halbert. The manœuvre compelled Firebras and Salusbury slightly to alter their position, to avoid being wounded by the bayonets, and in doing so, they necessarily gave admittance to the point of the halbert. The efforts of the assailing party were redoubled, and the trap slightly yielded.

"Lose not a moment! fly, Sir Norfolk!" cried Firebras, apprehensive lest the baronet's deliberation, which he well knew nothing could shake, should prevent his escape.

But true to his principles, Sir Norfolk would not move an inch.

"I cannot leave you in angusto," he said.

"But I am the stronger of the two, as well as the more active," rejoined Firebras. "My weight will suffice to keep down the trap-door till you have got through the window, and then I can make good my retreat. Fly! fly!"

But Sir Norfolk continued immovable.

"I shall be the last to quit this place," he said, in a tone of unalterable determination. "But do not, I pray you, tarry with me. The trifurciferous myrmidons of the Hanoverian usurper shall never take me with life."

"I must leave the punctilious old fool to his fate," muttered Firebras, observing that the greater part of the head of the halbert was forced through the side of the trap. "God protect you, Sir Norfolk," he cried, rushing to the window.

The brave old Welsh baronet essayed to hew off the head of the halbert from the staff—but in vain; and finding that the enemy must gain admittance in another moment, and that Firebras had cleared the window, he turned away and strode majestically towards it. His retreat was so suddenly made, that the grenadier who held the pike, and was prizing with all his force, lost his balance, and tumbled off the ladder, causing such confusion among his comrades, that Sir Norfolk had time to get through the window unmolested.

It was a beautifully bright night—the moon being at the full, and the sky filled with fleecy clouds. On the left, lay ridges of pointed-roofed houses, covered with the warm-looking and mellow-tinted tile, so preferable to the cold blue slate—broken with stacks of chimneys of every size and form—dormer windows, gables, over-hanging stories, and other picturesque and fantastic projections; and the view being terminated, at some quarter of a mile's distance, by the tall towers and part of the roof of Westminster Abbey.

Viewed thus, the whole picture looked exquisitely tranquil and beautiful. The fires in the houses were almost all extinguished, and little or no smoke issued from the chimneys to pollute the clear atmosphere. Above the venerable and majestic fane hung the queen of night, flooding its towers—seen at such an hour to the greatest advantage—with silvery light, and throwing some of the nearer buildings and projections into deep shadow, and so adding to the beauty of the scene. On the right, the view extended over other house-tops to the gardens and fields of Pimlico. Behind, was Saint James's Park, with its stately avenues of trees, its long canal, and Rosamond's Pond glimmering in the moonlight; while in front lay the New Artillery-ground, and the open and marshy grounds constituting Tothill Fields. But it will be readily imagined that neither Firebras nor his companion looked to the right or to the left. They were only conscious of the danger by which they were menaced, and were further discouraged by Father Verselyn, who at that moment scrambled over the roof they were about to cross, to inform them that the door by which they hoped to escape, could not be got open.

"Everything seems to have gone wrong!" cried Verselyn, in an ecstasy of terror. "What will become of us?"

"Jacta est alea," replied Sir Norfolk, composedly. "We must fight for it, father."

"Heaven and all its saints protect us," cried the priest, crossing himself.

"Be composed, father," rejoined Firebras, sternly. "You ought to be equal to any circumstances in which you may be placed. Ha!"

The latter exclamation was occasioned by a joyous shout, announcing that their friends had succeeded in opening the door; and the next moment the good news was confirmed by Sir Bulkeley Price, who clambered over the roof to acquaint them with it. On hearing this, the party instantly beat a retreat; and their flight was accelerated by the officer and the tall grenadier, who, at that moment, sprung out of the window. Even Sir Norfolk was urged to a little more expedition than usual; and two or three of his mighty strides brought him to the top of the roof. Cordwell Firebras would not have been much behind him, if Father Verselyn had not caught hold of his coat-tails to help himself up the ascent, which he felt wholly unable to accomplish without assistance.

By this time, the officer was well nigh upon them; and, finding his summons to surrender wholly disregarded, he made a pass at the priest, which took effect in the fleshy part of his leg, restoring him at once to more than his former agility. Uttering a loud yell, and clapping his hand to the wounded limb to staunch the blood, Father Verselyn bounded over the roof, and made to the door, through which the landlord and Mr. Travers had already disappeared, and through which Mr. Cripps was now darting.

Between the two roofs lay a small flat space, used by its former proprietor as a place for drying clothes, as was evident from the four tall posts at the corners. Here, Firebras and Sir Norfolk came to a stand, resolved to dispute the passage with their pursuers. Sword in hand, and calling to them to surrender, the foremost officer dashed down the roof; but his precipitation placed him at the mercy of Firebras; for his foot slipping, the latter struck his sword from his grasp. Sir Norfolk, in the interim, had encountered another foeman with equal success. This was the tall grenadier, who, as he descended, made a thrust at the baronet with his halbert, which the latter very adroitly parried, and, lounging in return, disabled his adversary by a wound in the arm. At the same moment, too, the tiles gave way under the weight of the grenadier, and he sank above the knees in the roof.

Other foes were now at hand. The second officer, carrying a lantern in one hand, and a drawn sword in the other, appeared on the roof; while the tall caps and bayonets of the rest of the grenadiers were seen above it. Though Sir Norfolk, whose blood was up, would have willingly awaited the advance of these new opponents, he yielded to the entreaties of Firebras, and followed him through the door, which was instantly secured behind them by a couple of strong bolts.

The house in which the Jacobites had taken refuge was expressly hired by them for an occasion like the present, and kept wholly uninhabited. The mode of communication between it and the Rose and Crown will, it is hoped, be sufficiently understood from the foregoing description. That so many unforeseen accidents should have occurred at a time when, if ever, things ought to have been in readiness, almost drove the poor landlord distracted; but if he could have watched Mr. Cripps's manœuvres, he would have speedily found out the cause of the delays. In the first instance, a penknife, dexterously slipped by the valet into the groove of the window, prevented it from moving, and had well-nigh, as has been seen, occasioned the capture of the fugitives. This difficulty having been overcome by the strenuous efforts of Sir Bulkeley and Mr. Travers, Mr. Cripps was the first to scramble through the window.

"Which way?" he cried to the landlord, who was following.

"Over the roof, and to the door opposite," was the reply.

Nimbly as a cat, the agile valet bounded over the roof, and instantly perceiving the door, made towards it. A key was in the lock; he turned it, took it out, and dropped it into the street below. He then began to shake the door violently, and shouted to the landlord, who at that moment came in sight.

"Unlock it—unlock it!" cried the host.

„I can't," cried Mr. Cripps; "there is no key. 'Pon rep! we shall be all taken."

"No key!" exclaimed the landlord. "Impossible! I saw it there this morning myself. It must have dropped down. Look about for it."

Mr. Cripps feigned compliance, and the landlord coming up, poured forth a torrent of imprecations on finding his statement correct. Father Verselyn, as has been related, crept back to Firebras, while the others used their efforts to open the door. Nor were they long in effecting their purpose. Finding all other attempts fail, the landlord stepped back on the leads, and running to give additional impetus to the blow, dashed his foot against the door, and the lock yielded with a loud crash.

Balked in his schemes, the plotting valet would fain have practised some new trick upon them; but the presence of Cordwell Firebras, whose suspicions he was fearful of arousing, restrained him. Indeed, he had little opportunity for further display of his art. Ordering the others to go down stairs, Firebras only tarried to lock an inner door, and then followed them.

The house, as already stated, was perfectly empty, and opened at the back into a court, which branched off into several of those intricate alleys with which petty France abounds. Two minutes had not elapsed before the fugitives found shelter in this court, and were rapidly threading it, and though they were noticed by some of the neighbours, who had been alarmed by the shouts of the soldiery, and took them for a gang of housebreakers, they effected their retreat without further molestation. The officer and his followers succeeded in breaking into the garret; but before they could burst open the inner door, the party had quitted the house.

Guided by the landlord, the priest and Mr. Travers scudded through a labyrinth of passages leading in the direction of the New Chapel, which building they skirted on the left, and crossing Stretton's Ground, found a secure asylum at a small public-house in Duck-lane, where the landlord was known, and where the unfortunate priest, who had become very faint from the loss of blood, was enabled to get his wound dressed.

Sir Bulkeley Price, Sir Norfolk, and Firebras, took the opposite direction; and after traversing several narrow passages, reached James-street, where, finding they were not pursued, they slackened their pace, and entering the park at the gate near the lower end of Rosamond's Pond, proceeded to Firebras's lodgings. A slight tap against the window speedily procured them admittance. The shutters were then closed, and Firebras threw himself into a chair, and for some minutes maintained a profound silence, which neither of his companions seemed disposed to break.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, at length, "our meetings at the Rose and Crown are over. We must find some other place of rendezvous. This is a most unlucky chance."

"There never was a plot nor conjuration but experienced some contrarious accident, Mr. Firebras," replied Sir Norfolk, calmly. I am in nowise astonied at it."

"In my opinion, treachery has been practised upon us," remarked Sir Bulkeley; "and I suspect the landlord is the author of it."

"My suspicions attach to Mr. Villiers's gaudily ornate serving-man," remarked Sir Norfolk. "I own I misdoubted him ab incepto."

Firebras said nothing; but rose, and opening a cupboard, took out a bottle of rosa solis and glasses, and set them before his guests. Sir Bulkeley quickly tossed off a couple of glasses; but Sir Norfolk, who was a pattern of sobriety, as he was a model of punctilio, declined to drink. They then fell into debate, and it was broad daylight before they separated,—Sir Bulkeley taking his way across the park to his residence in St. James's-square, and Sir Norfolk proceeding to his lodgings in Abingdon-street.

It now only remains to inquire after Mr. Cripps. He followed the landlord and his party for a short distance, and then coming to a halt, held a brief communion with himself.

"I have failed this time," he thought; "but it is all owing to the bad management of that brainless little barber. However, I'll take care he has the full blame of it with the Jacobites; and the next time I attempt their capture, I'll make sure work of it. It will be no use lodging information against any of them, for no proof can now be obtained of their presence at the meeting. No, no; I must keep upon terms with them, and abide my time. They must all be taken in the fact; and then my reward will be proportionate. I wonder whether Pokerich is in safety. I saw the little rascal among the guard on the house-top, and he looked almost as much frightened as Father Verselyn. By-the-by, something may be made of that priest. He's a double dealer, I'll be sworn. 'Pon rep! I like these nocturnal adventures vastly. They remind me of the romances I have read, and make me fancy myself a hero. A hero! Egad, the heroes of romance don't generally betray their friends. But that only shows the authors of such works don't draw from real life. But I must go home and get a little rest, or I sha'n't be in trim for Marylebone Gardens and my dear Mrs. Nettleship to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. JUKES'S NOTIONS OF DOMESTIC HAPPINESS—TRUSSELL A LITTLE THE WORSE FOR WINE—RANDULPH RECEIVES A NOTE FROM FIREBRAS—JACOB POST BRINGS INFORMATION TO ABEL.

SHORTLY after Hilda's departure, Abel Beechcroft summoned his butler, and informed him he was going out. "I shall be back in time for dinner," he said. "If Miss Scarve should call again during my absence, which is not impossible, though I think it unlikely, show her into the library, and take care that Randulph does not see her."

"I was in hopes, sir, that your interview with that dear young lady might have altered your views in regard to your nephew," replied Mr. Jukes. "I've been pleasing myself ever since she went away with the idea of the nice wife she'd make Mr. Randulph. They seem cut out for each other—just of an age—and it's difficult to say which is the handsomest. Bless my heart! if the marriage *should* take place, what a feast we should have, and how busy I should be! And then, of course, you'd have the young folks to live with you; and you'd get so fond of your new niece, that you wouldn't bear her out of sight for an instant, but would be happier than you've been before. And then, in due time, you'd have to turn one of the upper rooms into a nursery, and I should see you sitting in your easy chair, not with a book before you, blinding your eyes, but with young Master Crew on a rocking-horse on one side, and young Miss Crew on t'other, while the nurse would be bringing you a third crowing little bantling in long petticoats, encouraging the growth of its teeth, and cultivating a taste for music at the same time with a silver rattle."

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated Abel, who had allowed the butler to ramble on in his own way. "Your notions and mine of domestic happiness differ materially. I've always treated you with great confidence, Jukes," he added gravely; "and I confess I should be glad to see Randulph well and happily married. But I'm in no hurry about it. It is desirable tha the should see something of the world—something more of female society, in order that he may understand his own tastes better before he takes a step on which the whole happiness, or misery, of his future life will hang. It's a sad thing for a man to discover, when too late, that he hasn't chosen well."

"It must be rather disagreeable, no doubt," rejoined Mr. Jukes; "but I don't consider an old bachelor like you a competent judge in the matter. However, if Mr. Randulph chooses Miss Hilda, he'll choose well—that I'm prepared to maintain."

"Jukes," said Abel, sternly, "it is time to check your loquacity. Much as I am pleased with Hilda Scarve—and I assure you she has won upon my affections in an extraordinary manner—I do not desire, for reasons which it is needless to explain, that she should become the bride of my nephew."

"Those reasons of yours lie so deep, sir, that I can't fathom them," replied Mr. Jukes; "unless—but I should have thought you too old."

"Too old for what, Jukes?" said Abel.

"At all events, I should have thought *her* too young," pursued the butler. "But stranger things *have* happened."

"What the deuce do you mean to insinuate, sirrah?" cried Abel.

"Why, I fancy you want to marry Miss Hilda yourself, sir," replied the butler. "And I'm sure I've no objection—none on earth—if you can get the lady's consent. Only I think there's a little too much disparity, that's all."

Abel flushed to his very temples, and then became pale as death. He made no reply, however, but walked quickly towards the window, returning the next moment with his wonted composure.

"I scarcely know whether to laugh at you, or reprove you for your strange supposition, Jukes," he said. "In any other case than this, I certainly should have been angry; but here," he continued, in a slightly tremulous tone, "my feelings are too deeply interested. No, Jukes, I shall never marry—least of all, the daughter of ——" here his utterance failed him.

"I understand, sir," resumed Jukes, hastily. "Don't say another word. I see my mistake."

"Then repair it," rejoined Abel, recovering himself. "Mind, I will have no excuse for neglecting my instructions."

With this, he proceeded to the hall, and taking up his hat and stick, reiterated his injunctions to the butler, and went forth.

Mr. Jukes returned to his pantry, ruminating on what had occurred, and muttering to himself, "I almost wish our quiet house hadn't been disturbed by these young folks. I perceive plainly that Randulph will fall over head and ears in love with Hilda—if he hasn't done so already—and then my master'll quarrel with him, and then—but no, he's sure to pardon him, just as I always overlook the faults of my graceless nephew, Crackenthorpe. However, it wont do for me to bring 'em together; and I hope the young lady mayn't come back."

His apprehensions were groundless. At the very time he was thinking of her, Hilda was passing the Folly on the Thames.

At a little before four o'clock, Abel Beechcroft returned, and seemed much relieved to find that nothing had occurred during his absence. He sat down to dinner by himself at the appointed time, discussed the meal in silence, and even when the wine was placed before him, evinced so little disposition to talk, that Mr. Jukes took the hint, and left him alone. He continued in the same mood during the whole evening; reading as long as the light permitted, and then repairing to the garden, where he remained till summoned to supper. In reply to his inquiries whether his brother and nephew had come back, he was told that the former had returned about an hour ago, alone.

"Alone!" echoed Abel, shrugging his shoulders, and glancing triumphantly at Mr. Jukes. "I told you how it would be. Randulph's career of dissipation has begun with a vengeance.

Where will it end, eh?—where will it end, Jukes? Tell me that."

"I wish I could," responded the latter, with something like a groan.

Abel found his brother in the supper-room, and at once perceived, from his uncertain movements and flushed looks, that he had taken too much wine.

"So you have not brought your charge home with you," he observed, drily. "Where is he?"

"'Pon my soul, that's more than I can tell!" laughed Trussell. "He dined with Sir Singleton Spinke and myself at a French ordinary in Suffolk Street, and left us to keep an appointment—he! he!—soon after five o'clock. I expected to find him here on my return; but I suppose he has been detained. You must make allowances for young men, sir. It is his first indiscretion—ha! ha!"

"I hope it will be his last," replied Abel, seating himself. And as the supper proceeded, he elicited from Trussell, whose condition rendered him exceedingly communicative, a full account of all that occurred during the morning, including even the glimpse they had obtained of Hilda, at the time of her passing the Folly.

'And did she see Randulph?" asked Abel, quickly.

'To be sure," replied Trussell, laughing; "she couldn't help it. The boat was close to us. And, egad! I must say, if I am any judge of such matters—which I flatter myself I am—she looked desperately annoyed at seeing him with the pretty actress—he! he! Your health, brother!" he added, raising a bumper of claret, poured out by the butler, to his lips.

"I'm not sorry for the rencounter," muttered Abel. "A glass of white wine, Jukes. Brother, I drink to you. And how did Randulph behave on the occasion?"

"It embarrassed him devilishly," rejoined Trussell; "and, in fact, he didn't recover himself during the whole day."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Abel, thoughtfully. "And is he gone to visit the pretty actress, Kitty Conway, to-night—eh?"

"I'faith, I can't say," replied Trussell, laughing. "I left him to his own devices. But we shall have him back presently, and then you can catechise him yourself—ha! ha!"

Trussell continued talking, laughing, and quaffing, during the whole of supper. He was in far too jovial a mood to notice—or heed, if he did notice them—the grave looks of his brother, at his boasts of the introductions he should give his nephew—the sights he should show him—and the perfect gentleman he would make him. Abel's brow grew dark as the clock struck eleven, and Randulph had not returned. He made no remark, however, but rising, called for a light, and, wishing his brother good night, he retired to rest.

"I'm afraid Mr. Randulph has displeased his uncle, Mr. Trussell," said Mr. Jukes. "I wish he had come home before the old gentleman went to bed."

"I wish he had, Mr. Jukes," replied Trussell, laughing; "but it can't be helped. Boys will be boys. I needn't tell you I was just such another at his age."

"You were a great deal worse than he'll ever be, I hope," replied the butler, shaking his head.

"Ha! ha! I fear so, Jukes," replied Trussell, smiling, as if a high compliment had been paid him. "I was a sad fellow—a sad fellow! I've been talking over old times and old adventures with Sir Singleton Spinke; and I fear we were terrible rakes—he! he! The young men of the present day have sadly degenerated. They haven't half the spirit of the beaux of good Queen Ann's days, when I was young—that is, when I was a boy, for I'm young still. The bottle's empty, Jukes. But perhaps you think I've had wine enough. And, i'faith, I almost think so myself. So I'll e'en seek my pillow.

"The man that is drunk is void of all care,
He needs neither Parthian quiver nor spear;
The Moor's poison'd dart he scorneth to wield,
The bottle alone is his weapon and shield.
Tol de rol.

"This world is a tavern with liquor well stored,
And into't I came to be drunk as a lord;
My life is the reck'ning, which freely I'll pay,
And when I'm dead drunk, then I'll stagger away!
Tol de rol.

Sit up for Randulph, Jukes. I'll lecture him in the morning. Carry the candle, old fellow, and lend me your arm, for I don't feel quite so steady as usual.

"If I live to be old, for I find I go down,
Let this be my fate in a country town;
May I have a warm house, with a stone at the gate,
And a cleanly young damsel to rub my bald pate.
Derry down!"

And singing and laughing in a maudlin manner, he was conveyed up stairs to bed.

Abel's first inquiry, when Mr. Jukes entered his room on the following morning at seven o'clock, was as to the time at which his nephew returned overnight, and he received for answer,

"Oh! somewhere about half-past eleven, or twelve, sir, I didn't exactly observe."

"You took care not to do so," rejoined Abel. "But what account did he give of himself."

"I really didn't question him, sir," returned Mr. Jukes—"He went to bed almost immediately. But if he retired late, he's up early enough; for he's in the garden already."

"The deuce he is!" cried Abel, getting up. "Well, come, that's something in his favour, at all events. My dressing-gown, Jukes."

"If I might offer an opinion, sir," said the butler, as he assisted his master to put on his morning-robe, I should say Mr. Randulph hasn't been at a gay party. He looks very thoughtful, and as if he had something in his mind. I hope he isn't going to fight a duel."

"I hope not!" cried Abel, hastily. "That may account for his getting up so early. I must see him, and prevent it. Don't let him go out, on any account, till I come down."

Having dressed himself as expeditiously as he could, he proceeded to the garden, where he found his nephew looking quite as pensive as he had been described by the butler.

"You were late home, last night, Randulph?" he said, after the usual greeting had passed between them.

"I was, indeed, much later than I intended, uncle," replied the young man; "but I was unavoidably detained."

"May I ask in what way?" rejoined Abel.

"Pardon me, uncle, if I do not answer the question," replied Randulph.

"I will not press you," rejoined Abel, severely. "But upon one point I require a direct answer. You have not, I trust, an affair of honour, so called—but most mistakenly—on hand?"

"I have not!" replied Randulph, emphatically.

"I believe you," rejoined Abel. "And so I am told you saw Hilda Scarve yesterday, and under circumstances not very agreeable to yourself?"

The young man blushed deeply.

"I am not sorry to find you have some shame left," said his uncle; "and trust the occurrence may prove a wholesome lesson to you. And now, while I am lecturing you, let me add that there are other dangers to which you may be exposed, besides those arising from pretty actresses and dissipation. I mean political dangers—dangers springing from the secret societies and their agents. Your father, I am aware, inclined to the Jacobite cause; and I am aware, also, that your mother had, and still has, the same bias. But she gave me to understand you were a stanch Hanoverian. Has she misrepresented you?"

"Most assuredly not!" replied Randulph. "But I have troubled myself so little about the matter, that it is only lately that I have discovered her opinions were adverse to my own. I am obliged to you for the caution you have given me. Do you chance to know a gentleman named Cordwell Firebras?"

"The name seems familiar to me," replied Abel, musing. "Ah! now I recollect it. It belonged to a person who was concerned in the Rebellion of '15, and had well-nigh involved your father in it But what of him?" he continued, regarding Randulph fixedly. "Do you know him? Have you met him since you came to town?"

"I must again decline answering the question, uncle," replied Randulph.

"Your declining to do so *is* an answer in this case," rejoined Abel; "and I must warn you against him as a most dangerous person. Thirty years have elapsed since this Firebras placed your poor father in fearful jeopardy. But if he is the person I have heard described, they will not have changed him."

"Set your mind at rest as to his influence over me," replied Randulph. "I shall never waver in my loyalty."

"I am glad to hear it, nephew," returned Abel; "for rely upon it, if, unhappily, another rebellion should break out, it will end as disastrously as the first. And now let us go to breakfast."

And leading the way to the house, they sat down to the well-spread board. Trussell did not make his appearance, and the meal passed off satisfactorily enough, until, towards its close, Mr. Jukes brought a note, which he delivered to Randulph.

"By your leave, uncle," said Randulph, glancing in some confusion at the superscription, and recognising the hand.

He then broke the seal, and read as follows:—

"I am going to Mr. Scarve; and if I have an assurance of regret from you for your hasty conduct last night, and an undertaking that you will join us, I will engage to procure you the hand of his daughter. Your determination must be speedily made; for to-day he is about to sign a marriage contract with his nephew, Philip Frewin. The bearer will bring you to me, if you desire to see me. "C. F."

"You seem agitated, nephew," observed Abel. "Are the contents of that note secret?"

"Indeed, sir, they are," replied Randulph. "And, what is more, I must answer them in person."

"Oh, by all means do so," replied Abel, testily. "But remember my caution."

Randulph then hurried out of the room, and found, in the hall, the landlord of the Rose and Crown, who had brought him the note.

"Are you going with me, sir?" asked the landlord.

Randulph replied in the affirmative; and they quitted the house together.

"Abel was a good deal surprised and annoyed at his nephew's departure, and repaired to his library, where he endeavoured to compose his thoughts with a book. But the remedy in this instance proved futile; for when Mr. Jukes entered the room about an hour afterwards, he found him pacing to and fro within it, with a disturbed air.

"Well, is Randulph returned?" he asked, quickly.

"No, sir," replied the butler. "I am come to say that Mr.

Scarve's servant, Jacob Post, is without, and wishes to speak with you."

"What's his business?" demanded Abel, sharply.

"I didn't inquire, sir," replied Mr. Jukes; "but something, I should fancy, relating to Miss Hilda."

"Most likely," said Abel. "Show him in."

And the next moment Jacob was admitted. He had his crabstick under his arm, and twisted his hat between his fingers as before, looking in any way but direct at Abel. Seeing his presence was desired by neither party, Mr. Jukes retired.

"Well, friend, what has brought you hither?" asked Abel.

Jacob coughed, and tried to clear away the huskiness that impeded his articulation.

"I'm come to see whether you've a situation for me, sir," he said, after sundry ineffectual attempts at plain speaking. "Wages isn't an object with me, sir,—they isn't, indeed. And I should like to serve you better than any other gen'l'man I know of."

"What! have you left Mr. Scarve?" said Abel.

"Not yet, sir," replied Jacob. "But he's given me notice. And if he hadn't, I think I should have done the same by him. He's grown worse than ever. He promised to give me a recommendation to you; but I don't think he meant what he said."

"Well, I'll see what can be done for you," rejoined Abel; "that is, if Mr. Jukes can find you a place,—for I must leave the matter entirely to him. But what about your young mistress?"

"I was comin' to her, sir," replied Jacob; "but I thought I'd settle my own affairs first. I've no good news to tell you about her. Master locked her in her own room last night, and he declares he wont let her out till she consents to marry his ne'vy."

Abel uttered an angry exclamation.

"Within these few days he's grown a downright barbareous domestic tyrant!" continued Jacob. "There's no bearing him. But to be sure he had enough to put him out of his way, yesterday; for you must know, sir, he was robbed of fourteen thousand pounds during our absence. However, he took it more quietly than one might expect; and I can't help thinkin' as how one Mr. Cordwell Firebras, a strange gentleman who visited him yestermornin', knew somethin' about it."

"Cordwell Firebras! Has he been with him?" asked Abel, in surprise.

"He was with him twice yesterday," replied Jacob. "And a note came from him this morning, which I know, from some words let fall by the old fellow concernin' it, related to your ne'vy and his daughter."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Abel.

"I almost fancy Mr. Firebras advised him to make up a marriage between 'em," pursued Jacob.

"'Sdeath!" exclaimed Abel, furiously. "How dares he make such a proposition? Who commissioned him to interfere?"

"That's more than I can tell," replied Jacob. "But howsomedever, I don't think master'll pay much attention to him, for he is going to sign a marriage contract with Mr. Philip Frewin and his attorney this mornin'."

"It must not be," rejoined Abel. "That Frewin is an impostor."

"So I thought from the first," returned Jacob; "but yesterday it was confirmed to me." And he proceeded to detail what he had witnessed at the Folly on the Thames.

Abel heard him in silence, and at the close of his narration said, "Much as I dislike your master—painful as the interview will be to me, I will see him myself. Do not announce my coming, but take care I obtain admittance. Get some refreshment as quickly as you can, and then make the best of your way home."

Jacob was not slow in obeying the injunction. Repairing to the kitchen, in less than five minutes he laid bare a cold shoulder of lamb, despatched half a dozen lettuces, which he plunged into a salt-stand, and then thrust almost whole into his capacious mouth, disposed of rather better than half a loaf, and washed all down with a large jug of strong ale. He then set off to the stairs by the river side, where his boat awaited him, and jumping into it, pulled off as swiftly as he could to the opposite bank.

CHAPTER XX.

ABEL'S INTERVIEW WITH THE MISER—UNEXPECTED APPEARANCE OF RANDULPH AND CORDWELL FIREBRAS—RESULT OF THE MEETING.

HALF an hour afterwards, Abel Beechcroft set forth; and taking his way beneath the trees of the Bishop's Walk—his own favourite promenade, where he used to pass the greater portion of each day, gazing at the broad and beautiful stream flowing past it,—proceeded along the Stangate, and crossing Westminster Bridge, directed his steps towards the Little Sanctuary. As he approached the miser's dwelling, a tide of tumultuous feeling pressed upon him, and he almost doubted his power of sustaining the interview he was about to seek; but stringing himself up to the task, he knocked at the door. The summons was instantly answered by Jacob, who was in readiness, and who, without a word, admitted him.

"You're just in time, sir," said the latter, in a deep whisper, as he shut the door; "he's with him."

"Who?—Philip Frewin?" demanded Abel, in the same tone.

"Ay, ay," replied Jacob. "Philip Frewin, and his attorney, Mr. Diggs." And striding along the passage, he threw open the door, and bellowed out,—"Mr. Abel Beechcroft!"

This unlooked-for announcement, followed by the entrance of the old man, whose stern features were charged with a menacing expression, and who did not remove his hat, caused the utmost surprise and consternation among the trio. The miser was seated at the table, listening to a clause in a legal instrument which had been drawn up by Diggs, who was reading it to him, but who instantly stopped on hearing the name of his visitor Philip, whose back was to the door, turned round in some confusion, and the miser, though greatly disconcerted, made an effort to command himself, and said in a voice of forced politeness, though suppressed rage,—"May I ask to what I am to attribute the honour of this most unexpected visit, Mr. Beechcroft?"

"You will attribute it solely to the interest I take in your daughter's welfare, Mr. Scarve," replied Abel. "I would preserve her from the arts of a scoundrel, to whom you are about to consign her."

"You are not perhaps aware in whose presence you stand, Mr. Beechcroft?" cried Philip, rising, and furiously regarding him.

"I believe you are Mr. Philip Frewin, the very person I referred to," replied Abel, coldly.

"Then I am to understand you applied the opprobrious term you have just used to me?" cried Philip.

"Most distinctly!" rejoined Abel. "And I am willing to repeat it—to strengthen it—if you desire it."

"Sir, you shall render me an account for this insolence!" cried Philip, clapping his hand to his side, and betraying by the movement—for he was disguised in his tattered apparel—that he was accustomed to carry a sword.

"Let the law deal with him, my good sir," interrupted Diggs. "You have a fair ground of action for defamation. As a professional man, I warn you to take heed what you say of my respectable client, Mr. Beechcroft."

"You and 'your respectable client' will pursue whatever course you think proper," replied Abel; "but do not imagine your menaces will prevent me from disclosing the truth to Mr. Scarve."

"If you come to defame my nephew to me, Mr. Beechcroft, your errand will be fruitless," said the miser, who had by this time fully recovered his composure. "I must decline hearing anything you have to say. After what passed between us, years ago, I am surprised you should come here at all; and I am still more surprised that you have obtained admittance, which you certainly would not have done if my inclinations had been consulted. But it seems I am no longer master of my own house, or of my own servant."

"Mr. Scarve," said Abel, in a commanding tone, and with a look that made the miser quail, "I have been called upon—solemnly called upon—to take this step. You well know the opinion I entertain of you, and the abhorrence in which I hold you, and that nothing would have brought me near you but a matter of the utmost urgency. I have been called upon, I repeat, by an appeal which I could not resist"—his voice slightly trembled—"to befriend your daughter, and at the sacrifice of all personal consideration, I *will* befriend her. She herself has told me she has the strongest dislike to your nephew, and never will marry him."

"All this may be very true, sir," replied the miser; "but I am at a loss to understand the right you have to mix yourself up in my affairs."

"He has no right whatever, legal or otherwise, to do so," interposed Diggs.

"I shall assume the right, then," replied Abel. "Mr. Scarve, if you are deaf to the appeal I have made to you, if you can resist the dying wish of your much-injured wife, for hers is the charge laid upon me, and are determined to force the inclinations of your child—if neither of these instances have weight with you, at least exercise the prudence which has hitherto been supposed to guide your conduct. You know me too well to suppose for an instant that I would deceive you. I therefore, in your presence, and in his presence, denounce your nephew as an impostor—a cheat—a swindler!"

"'Sdeath! sir, if you go on thus," cried Philip, fiercely, "neither your years nor my uncle's presence shall protect you."

"Let him pursue his own course," said Diggs, taking up a pen, and making some hasty memoranda on a sheet of paper. "We shall have swingeing damages—swingeing damages."

"Mr. Beechcroft," said the miser, "the opinion you have expressed of me is fully reciprocated. You cannot hate me more than I hate you. Nevertheless, I am free to admit that you are incapable of advancing a deliberate falsehood; and I therefore believe that you think what you tell me of my nephew. But you are completely deceived; and some one, for a base purpose, has practised upon your credulity. Mr. Philip Frewin is a careful and a prudent man—far too careful to please you—and has in a few years, saved a large sum of money. This, his attorney and mine, Mr. Diggs, will, I am persuaded, testify to you."

"Unless bonds, mortgages, and leases, to the tune of twenty thousand pounds and upwards go for nothing, I certainly can do so," replied Diggs. "Mr. Philip Frewin is worth that sum, besides fifty thousand pounds left him by his father, and which I have every reason to believe he holds in his possession. I agree with you, Mr. Scarve, Mr. Beechcroft must be the dupe of some designing person. But I can soon convince him of his error."

"You will, perhaps, convince my attorney, Mr. Plaskett, of Lincoln's Inn, whom I have instructed to make inquiries on the subject, sir," returned Abel, incredulously. "Meantime, I am satisfied that I have sufficient warrant for my opinion, and I therefore adhere to it. I also give you warning, Mr. Diggs, that I shall hold you accountable for your statement. You say that Mr. Philip Frewin is wealthy—that you have deeds of his in your possession proving him worth twenty thousand pounds and upwards. Let those deeds be exhibited to Mr. Scarve."

"There is some reason in this, Diggs," remarked the miser. "I should like to see them."

"If my client permits it, and you desire it, I can have no objection," replied Diggs, readily, yet with a certain uneasiness; "but I am grieved to think such a degrading course should be necessary to support a character which ought to be above all suspicion."

"Circumstances seem to render it necessary," said the miser. "And it must be as satisfactory to my nephew, as it will be agreeable to myself, that his character should be cleared from these aspersions."

"Undoubtedly," replied Philip; "and I will not rest till I have so cleared it."

"And to reduce the charges to a distinct form," said Abel, sternly, "I declare you, Philip Frewin, to be a ruined spendthrift and debauchée, seeking, under the disguise of a wretched miser, to delude your uncle into giving you his daughter. I charge you, also, Mr. Diggs, with assisting him in the cheat. As a professional man, you well know what the consequences of your fraudulent conduct will be."

"Aware that I have nothing to fear, I deride your threat," said Diggs, boldly.

"And so do I," added Philip, with a quavering laugh.

"May I hope, then, that you will suspend all further negotiations respecting your daughter's marriage till you are further satisfied on these points, Mr. Scarve?" said Abel.

"I will," replied the miser.

"Mr. Beechcroft may appear very disinterested in this matter," said Philip; "but in my opinion, the main object of his interference is to obtain my cousin's hand for his own nephew, Mr. Randulph Crew."

"So far from that being the case," said Abel, "I would as soon consent to her union with yourself as with him."

"Hum!" exclaimed the attorney.

"Don't alarm yourself on that score, nephew," said the miser. "Make good your own case, and Hilda is yours. But come what may, depend upon it, she shall never be the wife of Randulph Crew with my consent, or with a farthing of mine."

"Or of mine," subjoined Abel.

As these words were uttered, the side door opened, and Hilda entered, followed by Mrs. Clinton.

"Ah!" exclaimed the miser, darting an angry look at her. "What do you want here?—who let you out of your room?"

"Jacob unlocked the door, and informed me that Mr. Beechcroft was below," she replied; "and I therefore came down to see him."

"I trust I have opened your father's eyes to the trick attempted to be practised upon him," said Abel. "He has promised not to proceed in the matter till a satisfactory explanation is given him respecting your cousin's affairs. And as I know that can never be done, the match is virtually at an end."

"If it were not so," replied Hilda, "it would make no difference with me; for I here declare before you, that even if my cousin should prove to be what he represents himself, I will never wed him."

"After such a declaration, young man, is it possible you can desire to prosecute the match?"

"Is my cousin in earnest?" asked Philip, eagerly catching at the opportunity of escaping from the dilemma in which he found himself placed.

"You could scarcely doubt it," she replied. "But if you require a reiterated assurance, take it."

"Then, sir, if Hilda retains these opinions," said Philip, to his uncle, "there is an end of the affair."

"How so?" cried the miser. "You have my concurrence. Hilda will not dare to disobey me—to brave my displeasure."

"I will not take her on those terms," replied Philip. "I will have her by her own free consent, or not at all."

"Ah! you are more scrupulous than you were yesterday," observed the miser, suspiciously. "You shrink from your bargain. There is some truth in what Mr. Beechcroft has stated."

"Take care, sir," observed Mr. Diggs to Philip. "Your motives will be misconstrued."

"I care not," replied Philip. "I should be worse than Mr. Beechcroft represents me, to pursue a match, when the lady expresses so decided an opinion against it. I therefore beg to resign all pretensions to her hand."

"Nephew!" exclaimed the miser, in surprise.

"I am grateful for the good opinion you have entertained of me, uncle," pursued Philip; "and though I thus deprive myself of all chance of becoming your son-in-law, I will take care that you are fully satisfied of my title to that honour. Mr. Diggs shall wait upon you with the deeds."

"You are hasty, Philip—"

"Not so, uncle. I wish you good morning."

And he was about to depart, when the door was again opened by Jacob, admitting Cordwell Firebras and Randulph. It would be difficult to say whether the new comers, or those to whom they were introduced, were the most surprised at the meeting. Amid the confusion, however, Randulph contrived to approach Hilda.

"I fear," he said,—"indeed, I know I must have lowered myself in your opinion by my conduct yesterday. But, though it may be no exculpation, permit me to state that the situation in which you perceived me was the result of accident."

"No apologies are necessary to me, sir!" said Hilda, haughtily and distantly. "It cannot be other than matter of indifference to me who are your associates."

"Yet hear my explanation," pursued the young man. "The lady you saw me with was committed to my care by—as I live, by the very person who stands there, except that he was differently dressed at the time."

"I never saw you before, sir," said Philip—"never!"

"I am satisfied you are the person," cried Randulph—"I would swear to your voice."

"After this, sir, can you longer question the cheat attempted to be played upon you?" said Abel, to the miser.

"If he does doubt it," said Firebras, "I will open his eyes."

"It is plain I am tricked by some of you, and trifled with by all!" cried the miser, angrily. "I would my house were rid of you!"

"You shall be rid of me, at all events, uncle," said Philip, eager to escape. "Again I wish you good morning. Come, sir," he added, to the attorney. And they left the house together.

"I am glad he is gone," said Firebras. "Mr. Scarve, I have the pleasure to tell you your nephew is a consummate rascal, and it is well you are rid of him. Mr. Abel Beechcroft, I did not expect to meet you here, but your presence is singularly opportune."

"For what, sir?" demanded Abel, coldly.

"Why, to come to some arrangement respecting a matter in which the happiness of your nephew is materially concerned," replied Firebras. "I hope, sir, if these young people," pointing to Randulph and Hilda, "can understand each other, you will throw no obstacle in the way. And you, friend Scarve," he added, turning to the miser, "I counsel you to place this young man in the position of your nephew. He will make her a far better husband, and—" he whispered a few words in the miser's ear.

"The condition, I presume, which you annex to the union is, that my nephew should join the Jacobite cause, Mr. Firebras," demanded Abel.

Firebras made no reply.

"Is it not so, Randulph?" pursued Abel, sternly.

"Uncle," replied Randulph, rushing towards him, and flinging himself on his knee before him, "I love Hilda, passionately, and would sacrifice my life for her!"

"But not, I hope, your honour," replied Abel, coldly. "Recollect to whom you owe allegiance. Maintain your loyalty unsullied, or I discard you."

"Be not too hasty, sir," cried Randulph; "more than my life hangs on your breath!"

"Randulph Crew," said the miser, "I have suffered things to proceed thus far without interruption, because I have been taken by surprise; but no importunities of yours, your uncle's, or Mr. Firebras's, shall prevail upon me to consent to your union with my daughter; and I positively interdict you from seeing her again."

"And I lay the same injunction upon him," said Abel.

"Hilda!" exclaimed the young man, looking at her—"Hilda!" But she averted her gaze.

"Come with me, Randulph!" cried Abel, authoritatively, and moving towards the door.

And, heaving a deep sigh, Randulph followed his uncle out of the room.

"Hilda," said Cordwell Firebras, as soon as they were left alone—"you have lost a true lover—you, Mr. Scarve, have lost a good son-in-law—and I and the Jacobite cause have lost an excellent partisan."

END OF THE FIRST BOOK.

BOOK THE SECOND.

TRUSSELL BEECHCROFT.

CHAPTER I.

TRUSSELL'S APPEARANCE AFTER HIS DEBAUCH—HE PROCEEDS WITH RANDULPH TO LADY BRABAZON'S—THE PARTY GO TO MARYLEBONE GARDENS.

NEITHER Randulph nor his uncle felt disposed for conversation during their walk to Lambeth, whither they proceeded on quitting the miser's habitation; and, in fact, Abel thought it desirable to let the events that had just occurred work their own effect on his nephew's mind, without any assistance from him. Half an hour saw them home, and Mr. Jukes looked from one to the other as if anxious to learn what had happened; but he received no information. They found Trussell in the breakfast-room, reclining in an easy chair, sipping a cup of cold green tea to tranquillize his nerves, and reading the fashionable movements and intelligence in a morning paper, by the aid of a pair of spectacles, which he hastily took off on hearing their approach. He had on a loose brocade dressing-gown, a crimson silk nightcap, slippers down at heel, and ungartered hose hanging loosely about his legs. Altogether he had a very rakish and dissolute appearance. His eyes were red and inflamed, and his face flushed with the previous night's debauch. An open note lay beside him on the table sealed with a coronet. He looked up with an air of fashionable languor as his brother and nephew entered the room, and asked yawningly, where they had been, but receiving no answer, jumped up, and repeated the inquiry with real interest.

"Don't ask, brother," replied Abel, significantly—"Let it suffice that all is now right."

"I am glad to hear it," replied Trussell, "though I don't know what has been wrong. I've just received a note from Lady Brabazon, Randulph, inviting us to accompany her to Marylebone Gardens this afternoon. You know we are engaged to dine with Sir Bulkeley Price."

"Go to Marylebone, by all means," said Uncle Abel, kindly—"it will serve to distract your thoughts."

"I ventured to answer for you, Randulph," pursued Trussell, "because there is a fête there to-day, and you are sure to be much amused. You'll find Marylebone very different from the Folly—ha! ha!"

"Only folly under a different name and in a richer garb—that's all," laughed Abel.

"I'll now go and dress," said Trussell. "Lady Brab has sent us a subscription ticket," he added, pointing to a silver medal, about the size of a modern ivory Opera ticket, or "bone," stamped with designs in bold bas-relief, numbered, and inscribed "MARYBONE—ADMIT TWO," with the date, 1744.

Abel took up the ticket, glanced at it, and laid it down with a smile. Randulph made an excuse for retiring to his own room, and on reaching it threw himself into a chair to indulge his reflections. And bitter and crushing they were. Till within the last hour, when he fully believed he had lost her for ever, he had not known the extent of his passion for Hilda. Now he felt—as all who have loved deeply have felt on some such occasion—that his existence had become a blank to him—and that he should never be entirely happy again. Again and again he reproached himself for his folly in respect of Kitty Conway; and he almost resolved, like Uncle Abel, to forswear a sex that occasioned him so much torment.

A tap at the door aroused him from his meditations, and Mr. Jukes entering, informed him that his uncle Trussell was ready, and waiting for him. Randulph said he would be down in a moment; and making some slight change in his attire, which he scarcely thought suitable to the gay scene he was about to join, descended, and found his uncle in the hall fully equipped in a snuff-coloured velvet coat, laced ruffles, diamond buckles, a well-powdered bag-wig, and a silver-hilted sword. Trussell appeared rather impatient, and declared they were behind time: and he proceeded at a rapid pace to the stairs near Lambeth Palace, where he called a boat, directing the waterman to row as quickly as he could to Whitehall Stairs—the nearest point to Pall Mall, where Lady Brabazon resided.

As soon as they were gone, Abel summoned Mr. Jukes, and having partaken of a biscuit and a glass of wine, ordered the butler to prepare to attend him to Marylebone Gardens. Mr. Jukes, who was well enough pleased by the proposed expedition, made as little delay as was consistent with his dignity; and having delivered full instructions to the under-servant respecting dinner, presented himself in a well-powdered bob-major wig, a well brushed brown coat, white waistcoat, and black velvets; and what with his round, rosy face, his swag paunch, and shapeless legs, looked the model of a well-considered, well-fed, and most respectable servant.

Attended by the butler, Abel proceeded to Lambeth Stairs, where, as luck would have it, the ferry boat chanced to be crossing at that moment. Accordingly they got into it, and in a few minutes were transported together with a crowd of passengers of both sexes, and no less than six horses, in safety to the opposite side of the river. At the corner of Abingdon-street, they found a coach which Abel instantly engaged, and got into it, while Mr. Jukes with some difficulty clambered up to the box. They then drove along the Horseferry Road; passed at the back of Buckingham House, and proceeded along Hyde Park-lane to their destination.

Meanwhile, Trussell and Randulph, having arrived at Lady Brabazon's, were ushered into a magnificently-furnished drawing-room, where they found Beau Villiers, Sir Singleton Spinke, Clementina, and her ladyship; by the latter of whom they were very graciously received. Lady Brabazon instantly perceived Randulph's dejection, and exerting all her powers of wit and raillery soon raised his spirits. Whenever Lady Brabazon, indeed—mature coquette as she was—was determined to please, she seldom failed in accomplishing her purpose; and she directed her artillery with such tact and skill on the present occasion, that Randulph, armed as he conceived himself against such attacks, was not quite proof against her. It was quite evident, whether her feelings were interested or not in the conquest, that she was determined to captivate the young man. This was so apparent, that a slight feeling of jealousy was roused in the breast of the beau, and he somewhat abruptly intimated his intention of giving up a drive to Richmond, which he had meditated, and of accompanying them, instead, to Marylebone Gardens. This change of plan was not altogether to her ladyship's taste; but she affected to be delighted with it.

"By-the-by, Mr. Crew," she said to Randulph, "you must attend my Drum to-morrow night. I have asked the new beauty whom Villiers has discovered—I mean Miss Scarve, the miser's daughter. She's perfectly charming, Villiers says—but I forget: I needn't describe her, for you have seen her. As I live, I have called a blush to your cheeks! Ha! ha! don't you envy him his power of blushing, Villiers? Mr. Trussell Beechcroft, I suspect your nephew is in love with Miss Scarve. See how he crimsons at the mention of her name."

"Your ladyship forgets that my nephew is but newly imported from the country," replied Trussell. "He is not accustomed to the raillery of persons of your ladyship's wit."

"There's something more than bashfulness in his confusion," replied Lady Brabazon. "Mr. Crew is smitten by Miss Scarve—let him deny it if he can. And so for that matter is Villiers."

"I' faith am I," replied the beau; "and if her father will give her fifty thousand pounds, which I know he can do, I will make her a present of my name and person."

"You don't think it necessary to ask the young lady's consent?" said Randulph, scarcely able to conceal his displeasure.

"Assuredly not," replied the beau, with a self-sufficient smile, which Randulph thought perfectly intolerable—"I fancy I'm pretty certain of that."

"You see you've no chance, Mr. Crew," laughed Lady Brabazon—"your only resource is to get some other fair dame or damsel to take compassion on you!"

"Your ladyship, for example," said the beau, in a sarcastic and significant whisper. "But the young man doesn't seem disposed to profit by the suggestion."

Randulph's thoughts, indeed, were elsewhere at the moment.

"Well, I suspect Miss Scarve wont turn out half so beautiful as Mr. Villiers represents her," said Clementina, who couldn't bear to hear any other beauty spoken of except her own.—"I've generally been disappointed in the objects of his admiration, and make no doubt she will be like the rest of them—very commonplace and very vulgar."

"She is neither one nor the other," said Randulph, with some vivacity.

"Didn't I tell you he was in love with her!" cried Lady Brabazon, screaming with laughter, and displaying her brilliant teeth. "She has refused him, and that accounts for his dejection."

Randulph's cheeks literally burnt with shame.

"Egad! Lady Brab, I believe you have hit the right nail on the head this time," whispered Sir Singleton Spinke.

"Your ladyship is a little too hard on my nephew," interposed Trussell. "Spare him, I entreat of you."

"Indeed, I sha'n't," replied Lady Brabazon; "he must learn to take such matters with indifference."

"Well, I hope we shall have an opportunity of seeing this fair creature," said Sir Singleton; "but I fear her father wont let her come. I'm told he watches her like a green dragon."

"I've asked him to bring her," said Lady Brabazon, "and I know he wont refuse me. Shall I confess to you, Mr. Crew?" she added, laying her small white hand on his arm, "I've an admirer in this miser, whose heart is supposed to be fixed on his gold. Is not that a triumph?"

"A glorious one!" laughed Trussell. "But I don't wonder at any conquest on the part of your ladyship. Saint Anthony himself would not have been proof against you."

"If Mr. Scarve *should* propose, I advise your ladyship to accept him," said the beau.

"In that case, it wont do for you to make an offer to his daughter, Villiers," rejoined Lady Brabazon; "for I shall require him to settle all his property on me."

"Then I must get beforehand with you," said the beau, "for I'm resolved to have her."

At this moment, a footman entered, and informed Lady Brabazon that her carriage was at the door. He was followed by the little black page, leading the lap-dog by a silken cord.

"I shall not want you to-day, Mustapha," said her ladyship, taking the cord from him. "I will give Sappho an airing myself." She then arose, and taking Randulph's arm, and quitting the room with him, proceeded, through a line of powdered and richly-habited lackeys, to her carriage.

Clementina was escorted by Sir Singleton, and the two ladies being seated, Randulph was requested to take a place beside them. Mr. Villiers accommodated the two other gentlemen in his gilt chariot—the admiration of the day—and the carriages were ordered to drive to Marylebone Gardens.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. NETTLESHIP—MR. CRIPPS PERSONATES HIS MASTER—MARYLEBONE GARDENS—MR. CRIPPS DETECTED.

Before repairing to Marylebone Gardens, it will be needful to inquire into the proceedings of another person who proposed to visit it—namely, Mr. Cripps. Mr. Villiers, it will be remembered, had intended to drive over to Richmond on the day in question—to fulfil an engagement of more than a week's standing—but had suddenly, from jealousy or whim, changed his mind. Calculating, however, upon his master's adherence to his original plan, the valet had determined to profit by his absence to visit Marylebone Gardens.

Mr. Cripps, it has been shown, was a very great person in his own estimation; but he sometimes represented himself as a far greater person than he had any title to be considered, and induing himself in his master's clothes, laid claim also to his master's title; in other words, sinking the vulgar name of Cripps, he assumed the aristocratic one of Villiers. His displays of this kind were chiefly confined to the eastern side of the metropolis, where he was pretty certain not to meet either his master or his master's friends; his principal places of resort being White Conduit-house, Sadler's Wells, Hockley-in-the-Hole, Islington, Hogsden, and certain other places of entertainment on the Surrey side of the water.

One Sunday, when he was so disporting himself at White Conduit-house, he contrived to strike up an acquaintance with a very showy dame who happened to be there, and who was dazzled by his brilliant exterior and airy manners—so superior, she thought, to those of the vulgar throng around her. Having attended her during her stay, Mr. Cripps called a coach for her, led her to it, and was rewarded by a tender look and a tenderer squeeze of the hand at parting. He had previously ascertained that the lady's name was Nettleship, that she was the relict of a tallow-chandler, and resided in Billiter-square; that she possessed a handsome property, bequeathed to her by her deceased spouse, the tallow-chandler aforesaid; and moreover, that she was without incumbrances. Fortune thus appeared to have thrown a rich prize in his way, if he could but obtain it. He found, however, on further inquiry, that Mrs. Nettleship was under a marriage engagement to her late husband's partner, Mr. Rathbone, who was at that time in the country collecting debts, and settling his affairs. But though this circumstance certainly appeared untoward, he determined to persevere, being firmly persuaded that in love matters to dare was generally to succeed. With this view, he contrived to meet Mrs. Nettleship as often as he could, and had been exactly half-a-dozen times in her company prior to the opening of this history, during which period he contrived to heighten the agreeable impression he had produced on their first acquaintance, and in a great degree to obliterate the image of Mr. Rathbone.

Mrs. Nettleship was a lady rather below the middle size, but not altogether destitute of personal attractions. She had a very full and very comely figure, very white and very rounded little arms, with pink dimpling elbows; and though she had no neck, or at least none that was perceptible, from the wreaths of fat above and below it, she had cheeks large and round enough to make up for the deficiency. Her eyes were as small as those of a Chinese lady, but very black and bright—bright enough, her late husband used to say, "to light a candle at;" and her nose had the prettiest turned up point in the world. It was this feature, in especial, that called forth the descriptive powers of Mr. Cripps, who appeared in a state of ecstasy whenever he contemplated it or thought of it, and having a slightly turned up nose himself, contended, reasonably enough, that no beauty could exist without such a formation, and that Grecian noses, and above all, Roman noses, were detestable and unendurable. It was not difficult to bring Mrs. Nettleship to his opinion; and though she flustered and blushed at his compliments and fine speeches, and professed to think them too extravagant, it was evident she swallowed them as easily as if they had been strawberries and cream.

Mrs. Nettleship was at an age when, more than any other, such compliments are estimated; she was exactly forty-five, and she therefore knew the full value of her attractions. During their interviews, she had often expressed a strong desire to visit Ranelagh, Marylebone Gardens, or Vauxhall, in company with her admirer; but Mr. Cripps constantly evaded the request, under some plea or other, until an opportunity appeared to present itself, in his master's proposed drive to Richmond, and he resolved to hazard a visit to Marylebone Gardens with her, fervently praying it might decide his hopes.

So soon, therefore, as the coast was clear, he repaired to his master's dressing-room, and with the assistance of Antoine, the

French valet, ransacked the wardrobe, and attired himself in the richest habiliments it contained. Thus the embroidered scarlet coat, the flowered silk waistcoat, the black velvet breeches, the pearl-coloured silk hose, that had decorated the beau's own person on the previous day were now transferred to his own. To these he added one of his master's finest laced shirts, and a point-lace cravat. A pair of large diamond-buckles were fixed to his shoes, and a silver hilted sword to his side. He next selected a large and brilliant ring from the beau's jewel-box, which he placed upon his finger; covered his cheeks and chin with patches; put on a full flowing Ramillies periwig; thrust a magnificent gold snuff-box into his pocket, together with a fine cambric handkerchief; chose the handsomest clouded cane he could find; took up a feathered hat which had only been once before worn by his master, and which he himself had prevented him from wearing on that day; and having contemplated himself with great complacency in the large cheval-glass before him, declared to Antoine that he thought he should do!

Receiving a confirmatory reply from the French valet, he went down a back staircase, which he had often traversed before when bent on secret expeditions, and quitted the house. A coach was waiting for him at the corner of Spring Gardens, into which he got, and ordered the coachman to drive for very life to the top of Harley-street, where he had appointed to meet Mrs. Nettleship, and where, in fact, he found her waiting for him.

Discharging his own vehicle, he handed the lady out of hers; and apologising to her for having detained her, led the way to the gardens. He launched out into an eloquent panegyric on her dress, which he designated as ravishing, predicting its effect on the assemblage they were about to join. Mrs. Nettleship had, indeed, taken quite as much pains with her toilette as her admirer; and it was no slight satisfaction to her to find her efforts appreciated. Her gown was of blue and silver silk of the richest description, and inflated almost to the size of a balloon by an enormous hoop. She wore diamond ear-rings, and a diamond solitaire, while her neck was encircled by a chain of large orient pearls. Her stomacher was spotted with plated silver, and thickly studded with Bristol stones. Her sleeves were short and wide, tied above the elbow with white satin bows, and edged with deep falls of lace. Her cap was of pink silk, and caul-shaped, and from behind it floated two streamer-like crimson ribands. Her ruddy complexion, which needed no aid of rouge, was relieved by abundance of patches, while her little fat fingers, rosy as those of Aurora, pept from out a pair of black mittens. A large fan, then as indispensable to a lady as a sword to a gentlemen, completed her appointments.

Marylebone Gardens, it is well known, lay on the eastern side of the upper end of the lane bearing the same name—the whole of the country beyond Harley-street, which was not more than a third of its present extent, being open fields. They were of considerable size, and were originally laid out and planted at the beginning of the last century, at which time the public were gratuitously admitted to them. In one part of the grounds there was an excellent bowling green, which drew many lovers of that most agreeable recreation to it. By degrees, the gardens being very conveniently situated, rose in repute; and in 1737, their proprietor, Mr. Gough, began to demand a shilling for admittance—this sum entitling the visitor to its value in refreshments. But still further improvements were effected. Orchestras, boxes, and a theatre for musical entertainments, were erected within them. Besides the main walks, semicircular rows of trees were planted, and hedges contrived so as to form pleasing labyrinths for those who preferred privacy. Bowers and alcoves were built in different places; lamps were fastened to the trees, and at night, on the occasion of a fête, every part of the garden was illuminated with myriads of lamps of various colours. The company began to improve, and the price of admission was raised to five shillings. Fêtes of every kind were held here; and the place continued in vogue until nearly the end of the century with which its rise commenced. Malcolm mentions that a few trees, once forming part of Marylebone Gardens, were standing at the north end of Harley-street, in 1808. But we fear not even a stump of one of them is now left.

Carriages, coaches, and chairs were setting down their occupants at the entrance to the gardens, as Mr. Cripps and his companion drew near. Never had Mrs. Nettleship seen a gayer throng—the dresses she thought magnificent. There was Lady Ancaster, whom Mr. Cripps pointed out to her, in a brocaded lutestring sack, with ruby-coloured ground and white tobine stripes trimmed with floss—the Countess of Pomfret, in a black satin sack flowered with red and white—Lady Almeria Vane, in a scarlet unwatered tabby sack—Lady Ilchester, in a white tissue flowered sack. All these ladies wore hoops; but none of them, Mr. Cripps assured his companion, managed this equipment with half so much grace as herself.

Throughout this stage of the business, Mr. Cripps had some difficulty in playing his part, and it required all his effrontery to enable him to go through with it. Having affirmed to his companion that he was an intimate acquaintance of all the ladies of rank he encountered, and in the habit of attending their routs and parties, he was under the necessity of sustaining the character, and kept constantly bowing and kissing his hand to them. In most cases he succeeded; for the ladies he addressed, deceived by his showy attire, which seemed to mark him as somebody, returned his salutations. Mrs. Nettleship was enchanted. To be attended by so fashionable a person, who knew all the *beau* *monde*, was supreme felicity. She would have given the world to be introduced to some of the fashionable ladies, and intimated as much to her companion; but he was too shrewd to attend to the suggestion, contenting himself with saying, with a very impassioned look, "I hope, my angel, that one of these days, I shall have the honour of introducing you to my fair friends under another name. 'Twould make me the happiest of men—'pon rep!"

"Od's bodikins! Mr. Willars, how you do confuse me!" exclaimed the lady, spreading her large fan before her face.

By this time they had gained the principal avenue leading towards the orchestra, and at each step he took, Mr. Cripps kissed his hand to some elegantly dressed person.

"There's my friend Lord Effingham and his countess," he said—"glad to see you, my lord—that's the pretty Mrs Rackham—a bride, sweetheart, a *bride*," with tender emphasis—"that's the rich Mrs. Draper—I daren't look at her, for she's determined to have me, whether I will or no, and I can't make up my mind to it, though she's promised to settle sixty thousand pounds upon me, and to die in six months.

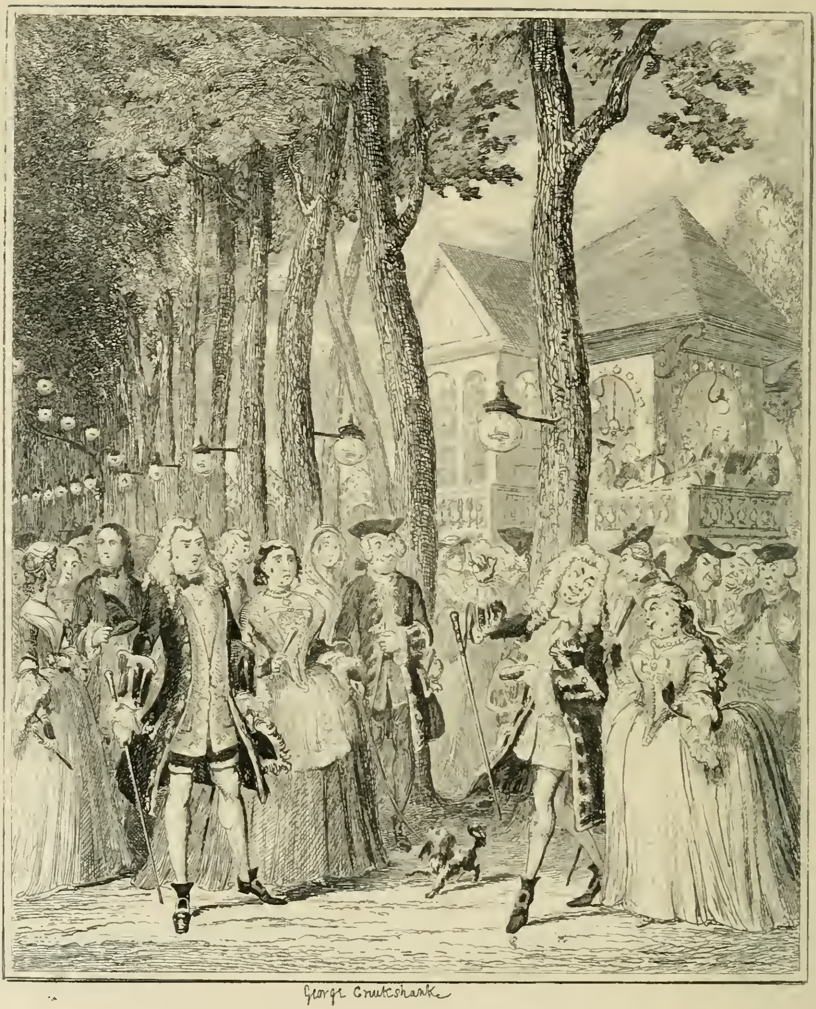
"La! Mr. Willars, you wouldn't sell yourself to such an ojus creature as that!" cried Mrs. Nettleship—"why, she's a perfect fright, and *so* dressed!"

"Precisely what you describe her, 'pon rep!" replied Mr. Cripps. "But do listen to the music. Isn't it inspiring?"

And they paused for a moment to listen to the lively strains proceeding from the orchestra, which was placed at one end of a large building facing the principal walk.

By this time, the company had almost entirely assembled. The main walk was completely thronged, and presented the appearance of the Mall at high tide, while all the boxes and alcoves were filled with persons discussing bowls of punch, plates of ham, chickens, salads, and other good things. The band in the orchestra was excellent, and the lively airs and symphonies added to the excitement and spirit of the scene. Mr. Cripps created a great sensation. Many persons thought they had seen him before, but no one could tell who he was. Meanwhile, the object of this attention continued to dispense his bows and smiles, flourished his clouded cane, tapped his magnificent snuffbox, and after astonishing all the beholders with his coxcombry, glided off with his companion into one of the side walks.

He had scarcely disappeared, when Lady Brabazon and her party entered the main walk. Her ladyship led her little spaniel by its string, and was attended on one side by the beau, and on the other by Trussell. Behind them walked Clementina, who had contrived to allure Randulph from her mother, and to attach him to her, while on the young man's left walked Sir Singleton Spinke.



George Cruikshank

Mr Cripps encountering his Master in Mary-le-bone Gardens

Everybody whom Mr. Villiers encountered told him of the prodigious beau who had just been seen on the walk—Lord Effingham, Major Burrowes, Lord Dyneover, Sir John Fagg—all described him.

"Who the devil is he?" cried Villiers.

"Haven't the least idea," replied Sir John Fagg. "But I'll speak to him, if I meet him again. He's your very double, Villiers. I'll swear he has employed Desmartins to make him a suit precisely like your own."

"Has he?" cried the beau, indignantly—"Then I'll never employ a rascally Frenchman again! and what is more, I wont pay him his bill."

The same thing was told him by twenty other persons, and the beau looked anxiously round for his personator, but was for some time unable to discern him.

Meanwhile, Mr. Cripps had sought this secluded walk to give him an opportunity of making a declaration to the widow, and though he was not positively accepted, he was not decidedly refused,—the lady only asking time to consider over the proposal. The audacious valet was on his knees, and rapturously kissing her hand, vowing he would never rise till he received a favourable answer to his suit, when two persons were seen approaching, whom, to his infinite mortification and surprise, he recognised as Abel Beechcroft, and his uncle, Mr. Jukes.

"We are interrupted, my charmer!" he cried, getting up, with a countenance of angry dismay—"Let us return to the public promenade. You wont refuse me? I shall kill myself, 'pon rep, if you do!"

"I'll think of it, Mr. Willars," said Mrs. Nettleship, twirling her fan. "But it would be a dreadful thing if I was to break my engagement to Mr. Rathbone!"

"Oh! curse Mr. Rathbone! I'll cut his throat!" cried Mr. Cripps, glancing anxiously down the walk. But unfortunately there was no outlet at the lower end, and he was compelled to turn and face the intruders. He looked also to the right and left, but on neither side was there an alcove into which he could retreat. Nothing was left for it but impudence, and luckily for him, this quality seldom deserted him at a pinch. Putting on his boldest manner, he strutted gaily, and with affected nonchalance, towards Abel and his uncle, who, as he advanced, stepped a little aside to look at him.

"Why, as I live!" cried Abel, "that's Mr. Villiers's valet—your nephew, Jukes."

"Lord save us! so it is," cried Mr. Jukes, lifting up his hands in astonishment. "Why, Crackenthorpe, what are you doing here—and in your master's clothes?"

"Truce to your jests, old fellow," said Mr. Cripps, waving him off, "and let me pass."

"What! disown your uncle!" cried Mr. Jukes, angrily, "and in the presence of his worthy master! The rascal would deny his own father. Pay me the ten crowns you borrowed yesterday."

"La! Mr. Willars, what's the meaning of all this?" asked Mrs. Nettleship.

"'Pon my soul, my angel, I don't know, unless the old hunks has been drinking," replied Mr. Cripps. "The 'rack punch has evidently got into his head, and made him mistake one person for another."

"'Rack punch!" cried Mr. Jukes, furiously. "I haven't tasted a drop! You call him Mr. Willars, ma'am," he added, to Mrs. Nettleship—"He's deceiving you, ma'am. He's not Mr. Willars—he's Mr. Willars's gentleman—his valet."

"A truce to this folly, you superannuated old dolt!" cried Mr. Cripps, raising his cane, "or I'll chastise you."

"Chastise me!" exclaimed the butler, angrily. "Touch me, if you dare, rascal! Crackenthorpe, Crackenthorpe—you'll certainly be hanged."

"Let him alone, Jukes," interposed Abel. "He'll meet his master at the corner of the walk, and I should like to see how he'll carry it off."

Taking advantage of the interference, Mr. Cripps passed on with his inamorata, who was as anxious to escape from the scene as himself; while Abel and Mr. Jukes followed them at a short distance.

It fell out as Abel had foreseen. As Mr. Cripps issued into the broad walk, right before him, and not many yards off, were his master and Lady Brabazon, together with the rest of the party. If the valet ever had need of assurance, it was now. But though ready to sink into the earth, he was true to himself, and exhibited no outward signs of discomposure. On the contrary, he drew forth his snuff-box, took a pinch, in his airiest manner, and said to Mrs. Nettleship—"There's Lady Brabazon—accounted one of the finest women of the day, but, upon my soul, she's not to be compared with you."

With this he made a profound salutation to Lady Brabazon, who looked petrified with astonishment, and kissed his hand to Trussell, who was ready to die with laughing. As to the beau, he grasped his cane in a manner that plainly betokened his intention of laying it across his valet's shoulders. But the latter, divining his intention, and seeing that nothing but a bold manœuvre could now save him, strutted up to him, and said in a loud voice—"Ah! my dear fellow—how d'ye do?—glad to see you—plenty of company"—adding in a lower tone,—"For Heaven's sake, sir, don't mar my fortune. I'm about to be married to that lady, sir—large fortune, sir—to-day will decide it—'pon rep!"

Mr. Villiers regarded him in astonishment, mixed with some little admiration; and at length his good nature got the better of his anger.

"Well, get you gone instantly," he said; "if I find you in the gardens in ten minutes from this time, you shall have the caning you merit."

"Good day, sir," replied Mr. Cripps,—"I'll not forget the favour." And with a profound bow, he moved away with the widow.

"And so you have let him off?" cried Lady Brabazon, in amazement.

"Upon my soul, I couldn't help it," replied the beau. "I've a fellow-feeling for the rascal—and, egad, all things considered, he has played his part so uncommonly well, that I hope he may be successful."

CHAPTER III.

A MAN-OF-THE-WORLD'S ADVICE ON A MATTER OF THE HEART—THE VISIT TO THE HAYMARKET THEATRE, AND THE SUPPER AFTERWARDS WITH KITTY CONWAY—RANDULPH AGAIN AWKWARDLY CIRCUMSTANCED WITH HILDA.

On the morning succeeding the visit to Marylebone Gardens, commemorated in the preceding chapter, as Trussell and Randulph sat together after breakfast, the latter communicated to his uncle all that had occurred at the miser's the day before, and besought him to give him a hope of obtaining Hilda's hand.

"I wish I could do so, Randulph," replied Trussell, who had questioned him particularly as to the lady's deportment and manner during the interview; "but I don't see how it is possible. Were it an ordinary case, I should say, Go on—make the attempt. Difficulties, especially in love matters, are always to be overcome by perseverance. But it is not so here. In the first place, you have forfeited the lady's esteem, and though that might be set to rights, if you had an opportunity for full explanation, yet, as affairs now stand, it is awkward. Then—what is far more important—her father and my brother are averse to the match; and though it wouldn't signify displeasing one of them, it wont do to offend both."

Randulph sighed deeply.

"If, from an over-nice sense of honour, which, though I applaud, I can scarcely understand," pursued Trussell, "you had not given your property to your father's creditors, you might have had Hilda for asking."

"Were the choice still left me, I would act as I have done," replied Randulph, emphatically. "I was bound to clear my father's memory."

"Nay, I am far from meaning to upbraid you," replied Trussell. "I think your conduct singularly honourable and disinterested, and not the less so because it has been attended with the present result. But in regard to this union, upon which you seem to have set your heart, and about which you have consulted me, I cannot seriously recommend you to indulge the thought of it for a moment. The two old gentlemen, who have the reins in their hands, set their faces against it so entirely, that, even if the lady's consent could be obtained, it would be the height of folly to proceed with it. You would only wed to beggary; and for Hilda's sake, as well as your own, that must never be."

"You are right!" cried Randulph, rising, and taking a turn round the room. "Is there no way of acquiring wealth expeditiously?"

"None that I am aware of," replied Trussell; "unless you choose to have recourse to the gaming-table, or the highway. You may, if you please, turn Jacobite, and obtain a commission from King James the Third. Such things, I hear, are now daily given away; and if he *should* come to the throne, your fortune will be made."

Randulph started; for this chance remark brought to his mind Cordwell Firebras's proposal, with which his uncle was wholly unacquainted. A means of obtaining Hilda's hand through the influence of this person presented itself to him. But he rejected the idea as soon as conceived.

"Jesting apart, nephew," said Trussell, who had noticed his confusion, but attributed it to a different cause, "you must give up all idea of Hilda. She is a charming girl, no doubt; but she is not the only charming girl in the world; and you must fall in love with some one else as quickly as you can. It seems impossible at present, I make no doubt. But don't despair. You'll get over your disappointment in time. Why not begin with Lady Brabazon? She has given you plenty of encouragement; and is just the woman to initiate you into the ways of the world. It would be quite worth your while to devote yourself to her for a season; and by this means you will gain a reputation for gallantry, which is very desirable for a young man."

"I have no such ambition, uncle," replied Randulph. "Lady Brabazon is extremely fascinating, but my heart is otherwise engaged."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Trussell, "we don't live in the days of chivalry and eternal constancy. Men are no longer the preux chevaliers they used to be. Women like us all the better for a little infidelity. They fancy us better worth having when others are running after us. One success leads to another. Nourish, if you please, a secret passion for Hilda, but amuse yourself as you think proper, in the meantime. If it answers no other purpose, it will prevent you from doing something desperate. By-the-by, it just occurs to me that we are to meet your lady love at the drum to night. Now let me advise you how to act."

Before the counsel could be given, Mr. Jukes entered the room, and delivering him a little perfumed billet, on a silver waiter, departed.

"From Lady Brab herself, I declare!" cried Trussell, glancing at the superscription, and breaking open the note. "Egad! here's a disappointment. Old Scarve wont allow his daughter to attend her ladyship's drum to-night if we go there; and so, she prays us to dine with her to-morrow instead."

"And thus I shall miss my only chance of seeing Hilda, while she will be exposed to the assiduities of that daring impertinent, Beau Villiers!" cried Randulph.

'Very true!" said Trussell, gravely.

'I wont receive the back-word," said Randulph. "I'll go in spite of her ladyship."

"Poh! poh! you mustn't think of such a thing," rejoined Trussell. "It would be an unheard of impropriety; and you would only expose yourself to insult. It's devilish unlucky, but it can't be helped. I've pointed out to you the remedy for the evil: forget Hilda, and replace her image with that of Lady Brabazon. If the beau robs you of your mistress, you can soon be even with him. Ha! ha! And now, since the plans of the day are so entirely changed, suppose we go into the city, and see some of the sights there, and afterwards dine at a coffee-house. Who knows but we may meet with some adventure that may completely divert the current of your thoughts."

Whatever Randulph might think of the probability of his uncle's notion being realised, he acquiesced in the suggestion, and not long after this, they sallied forth, and taking a boat at the Palace Stairs, rowed to the Tower, near which they were landed. Conversant with every object of interest in the old fortress, Trussell proved an excellent guide to his nephew, and they spent some hours in examining its various fortifications, and in talking over its historical recollections, as well as in visiting its armouries and its lions, and such matters as were then, and much more recently, exhibited to the public. From the Tower they proceeded to the Royal Exchange, where they likewise spent some time.

As the day had begun to draw in, Trussell proposed an adjournment to Kivat's coffee-house, where, he averred, they were sure of a good dinner and excellent wine. Randulph assented, and to Kivat's they repaired. Trussell's assertion was found to be well warranted; the dinner was capital, and the claret so good that, in spite of his nephew's remonstrances, he called for a second bottle. Randulph had already drunk more than he was accustomed to, but he could not resist the bumpers pressed upon him by his jovial uncle, who assured him that the best way of getting rid of care was to drown it in the glass. A third bottle was called for and disposed of; and Trussell then ordered a coach, and privately instructed the driver to take them to the little theatre in the Haymarket.

On arriving there, they were shown, by Trussell's desire, into a box near the stage, and as they entered it, the house was ringing with the applauses bestowed on a song which had just been executed by a female singer. The reiterated cries of encore were at length complied with by the fair object of them, who, advancing from the wings, whither she had retired, disclosed the figure and features of Kitty Conway. She repeated the song with infinite archness and spirit, and Randulph, like the rest of the house, was in raptures with her. He applauded vehemently, and as Kitty gracefully courtseyed in return for the plaudits, she recognised him, and during the rest of the performance, scarcely ever removed her eye from him. In spite of his efforts to avoid it, Randulph could not be insensible to the witchery of her glance; neither was he blind to the perfect symmetry of her exquisite little figure, displayed to the greatest advantage in a pretty peasant dress, or her airy movements, nor deaf to her joyous laugh that rung like silver upon his ears. He was, therefore, almost glad when the curtain fell, and hid her from his view.

Trussell, who had noted with secret satisfaction the effect produced by the pretty actress upon his nephew, and who had, perhaps not undesignedly, placed him so near her, now launched into a rapturous panegyric of her charms and talent, declaring both to be unapproachable; and while Randulph was assenting to all he heard, an orange woman entered the box, as was then the custom, and while affecting to offer her basket of fruit to the elder gentleman, slipped a note into the hands of the younger. She then withdrew, and Randulph, opening the billet, found, as he anticipated, that it came from Kitty Conway, and contained an invitation to him to sup with her after the play.

"You will go, of course?" said Trussell, as his nephew showed him the note.

Randulph looked perplexed.

"What! afraid of a pretty woman!" laughed Trussell. "I had a better opinion of you. I'll take care of you. Let me see where she lives. Oh, close by—at the corner of the Haymarket, next to Cockspur-street. By-the-by, the note is not directed. She doesn't know your name. Ha! ha!"

"Well, I suppose I must go," said Randulph.

"To be sure you must," laughed Trussell. "You'll forfeit all claim to be considered a youth of spirit if you don't."

The entertainments of the evening were concluded by the "Mock Doctor," in which Kitty Conway did not appear; and this over, they quitted the house, and repaired to the abode of the pretty actress. A footman in rich livery admitted them, and ushered them into a small but exquisitely-furnished apartment, blazing with wax-lights and mirrors, where they found Kitty seated on a couch, conversing with an old gentleman, who, as he looked up at their entrance, proved to be Sir Singleton Spinke. An elderly female, probably the fair actress's mother, was likewise present. The old beau seemed a little disconcerted on their appearance, but he instantly recovered himself. As to Kitty Conway, she sprang from the couch, and running towards Randulph, stretched out both hands to him with unfeigned joy, crying—"Oh! how very glad I am to see you! how kind in you to come! I had almost given you up. And now you must introduce yourself to me in due form; for though I wrote to you, you may have perceived I didn't know how to address my billet."

"Permit me to have that honour, sweet Kitty," said Sir Singleton, stepping forward, "for both are particular friends of mine. I was not aware they were coming, or I would have taken care to apprise you of their names. This is Mr. Randulph Crew, newly arrived from Cheshire, and with all the freshness—in every sense—of the country about him. And this is his uncle, Mr. Trussell Beechcroft."

"And his guardian also, I presume," laughed Kitty; "for it appears he wont let him stir without him."

"I ought to apologise for this intrusion, Mrs. Conway," said Trussell, "and I can only excuse myself on the ground of my excessive desire to make your acquaintance."

"You are Mr. Crew's uncle, sir—that is enough for me," replied Kitty. "I am delighted to see you."

Trussell bowed, and placed his hand upon his heart—a gesture peculiar to people who have very little heart to be so indicated.

"You have got the start of us, Sir Singleton," he said. "When we had the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Conway at the Folly on the Thames, the other day, I fancied you were unknown to her."

"Our acquaintance is only of two days' date," said Kitty. "Sir Singleton was good enough to send me——"

"Hush! hush! sweet Kitty, I implore you," interrupted the old beau.

"Nay, I haven't been enjoined to secresy," she rejoined. "He sent me a suit of diamonds worth five hundred pounds, entreating a moment's interview in return, which, of course, I could not refuse."

"Of course not," laughed Trussell. "Do you hear that, Randulph?" he whispered to his nephew. "Ah, you're a lucky dog! No diamonds necessary in your case, you see."

At this moment, the servant entered the room, and announced supper. Kitty gave her arm to Randulph, and the old beau and

Trussell contended for the elderly lady, who at length fell to the charge of the former.

Meanwhile, the pretty actress led her most favoured guest to the adjoining chamber, the walls of which were adorned with several choice paintings, most of them relating to theatrical subjects. Over the fireplace hung a portrait of Kitty herself in one of her favourite characters, and Randulph commented upon its resemblance to her with a warmth that brought the colour to her cheek, and caused her heart to palpitate against his arm. A round table stood in the middle of the room loaded with cold chickens, cold ham, cold tongue, lobsters, patés, jellies, and salads. There were several sorts of wine on the table; ratafia, rosa solis, and usquebaugh on the side-board; and champagne in ice on the beaufet. As soon as the others made their appearance, Kitty dismissed the attendant.

"We can wait upon ourselves just as well," she said, "and the presence of a servant is always a restraint."

"I am quite of your opinion," said Trussell. "Allow me to offer you a wing of a chicken."

"Thankye," replied Kitty. "Pray take care of yourself. Have you ever seen me play Flora in the opera before, Mr. Crew?"

"I'm almost ashamed to confess that this is the first time I've ever been in a theatre in London," replied Randulph.

"I told you he was fresh from the country, Kitty," laughed the old beau—"very fresh!"

"I like him all the better for it," she replied. "How singular I should be the first actress you have seen."

"Singularly delightful!" rejoined Randulph gallantly.

And Trussell, who sat next him, nudged him in token of his entire approbation.

"By-the-by, Sir Singleton," he said, "I haven't yet inquired how we chance to see you here to-night. I thought you were engaged to Lady Brab's drum?"

"So I was," replied the old beau. "In fact, I've been there for a couple of hours; but I prefer a supper with Kitty Conway to all the parties in the universe."

"You flatter me," rejoined the fair object of the compliment; "such a pretty speech deserves a glass of champagne. Will you join me and Mr. Crew in one?"

"With the greatest pleasure," replied Sir Singleton.

And springing up with an agility perfectly youthful, he took a bottle from the ice-pail, and poured its foaming contents into Kitty's glass.

"A thousand thanks, Sir Singleton," she said. "I'm concerned to give you so much trouble."

"Don't say a word," replied the old beau, bowing. "I'm enchanted to be your slave."

"I see no reason why we shouldn't follow their example, madam," said Trussell, taking the bottle from Randulph, and assisting the elderly lady.

"Nor I," she replied, returning his bow.

"Apropos of Lady Brab's Drum, Mr. Crew," said Sir Singleton, "old Scarve the miser, and his daughter, Hilda, were there."

"I understood they were expected," said the young man, setting down his glass.

"I hope the wine is not too much iced for you?" remarked Kitty, anxiously.

"Not in the least," he replied.

"It sometimes gives one a pain in the heart," said Kitty—"and I feared that such might be the case with you."

"She seemed to be greatly admired," resumed Sir Singleton; "but for my part, I agree with Clementina Brabazon, in thinking her beauty over-rated. One thing, perhaps, might be against her—she was decidedly out of spirits."

Randulph finished his glass.

"Who are you speaking of?" asked Kitty, who, in her anxiety about Randulph, had not caught the previous remark.

"Hilda Scarve," replied Sir Singleton. "She is considered very beautiful. But she wont bear a comparison with some one I could point out."

"I accept the compliment, Sir Singleton," rejoined Kitty, smiling. "I have heard of this fair creature before. Give me some ratafia, Mr. Crew, and pledge me. I can play the hostess, you perceive."

"To perfection—as you play everything else," returned Randulph.

"Why, you have only seen me in one part, and can't therefore judge," she replied. "However, I accept the compliment, as I have just done Sir Singleton's."

Trussell had felt some uneasiness about his nephew during the latter part of the conversation, but he now hoped the danger was past. He was mistaken.

"I forgot to say, Mr. Crew," remarked Sir Singleton, with a little covert malice, "that Villiers paid the miser's daughter very marked attention, and devoted himself to her almost exclusively during the whole time I remained."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Randulph, turning pale.

"And how did she receive his attentions?" interposed Trussell, adroitly.

"Why, coldly enough, I must say," replied Sir Singleton.

"Was her father with her?—did he sit near her?" asked Randulph, breathlessly.

"No; he was at cards, and thereby hangs a tale, which I will tell you anon. She was attended by Sir Norfolk Salusbury, who, I believe, is a relation of hers."

"Sir Norfolk is her cousin on her mother's side," remarked Trussell.

"He is a stiff, punctilious old fellow," laughed Sir Singleton. "He didn't seem in the least to approve of Villiers' attentions to Hilda, and I shouldn't wonder if they fight about her to-morrow. But now for the story I promised you. Old Scarve, who, it seems, is a capital whist player—"

"He was always so reputed," observed Trussell.

"And with reason, as you will find," rejoined Sir Singleton. "Well, he sat down to cards, in the early part of the evening, with Sir Bulkeley Price, and in less than an hour won twelve thousand pounds of him.

"Twelve thousand pounds, Sir Singleton!" exclaimed Trussell. "You amaze me."

"It amazed everybody else, too, I assure you," replied Sir Singleton. "Sir Bulkeley had had too much wine; and he went on losing and doubling his bets, until his losses amounted to the sum I've mentioned. I tried to stop him, but it was of no avail. You should have seen the old miser rise from the table after his success. I never beheld such fearful exultation. His eyes literally blazed, and he walked like a young man. Sir Bulkeley got up at the same time, with a very flushed face, and said, 'You shall have your winnings to-morrow, Mr. Scarve.' To which the miser replied, with a bitter sneer, 'The mortgage will do as well, Sir Bulkeley.'"

"A home thrust! and just like him," said Trussell. "Well, I've lost some money in my time, but never anything like this."

"I wish I could have such luck as the miser," said Kitty; "I'd leave off acting, and take to gaming. But you've been talking so hard, that you've forgotten to eat, gentlemen. For my own part, I should be glad of some champagne."

Her glass was instantly filled by Randulph, and Sir Singleton challenged the elderly lady. The conversation then became very lively. Kitty presently volunteered a song, which she executed so charmingly, that it quite ravished her auditors. In fact, her sprightliness, beauty, and accomplishments, coupled with her winning manners and good-nature, made her almost irresistible—and so Randulph found. The champagne circulated freely, and its effects began to be slightly manifest on the two elderly gentlemen. Again Kitty poured forth her clear and melodious voice in song, when the door opened, and a young man entered the room. It was Philip Frewin. He looked surprised and annoyed at seeing the party, and a flush of anger rose to his cheek as he recognised Randulph. Kitty Conway carelessly motioned him to a chair, which he took almost mechanically. Sir Singleton and Trussell slightly acknowledged his presence, but Randulph sternly regarded him.

"I believe, sir," he said, "you are the person I saw at Mr. Scarve's, and whom I previously met at the Folly on the Thames.

May I ask the meaning of the masquerade attire you assumed yesterday?"

"You are under some mistake, sir," rejoined Philip, with great effrontery. "I know nothing of Mr. Scarve."

"Not know him!" cried Randulph, in amazement. "I understood you were his nephew, Philip Frewin."

"I am no relation to Mr. Scarve, and my name is not Philip Fruin," replied the other.

Kitty Conway here burst into a loud laugh, which she continued in spite of Philip's angry looks.

"Will you oblige me with your real name, then?" demanded Randulph, after a pause.

"No, sir, I will not," replied Philip. "What the devil is it to you what I am called? I am not accountable to you for my actions. How comes this impertinent fellow here, Kitty?" he added, turning to her.

"He comes by my invitation," she rejoined; "and if you do not like his company, you can leave the house."

"It is for him to leave, not me," replied Philip. "If he wont go quietly, I shall be under the necessity of turning him out."

Kitty uttered a faint scream, and Randulph sprang to his feet, while the rest of the party regarded each other in dismay, as if in expectation of a scene.

Under the influence of excessive passion, which supplied him with a courage foreign to his craven nature, Philip strode towards Randulph, apparently with the intention of carrying his threat into execution; but before he could reach him, Kitty threw herself between them. Under her shelter, Philip became so violent in his manner and offensive in his language, that at last Randulph lost his patience, and snatching Sir Singleton's clouded cane from him, he pushed Kitty aside, and began to lay it with considerable energy upon Philip's shoulders. Roaring lustily, the latter made for the door, and Randulph pursued him, Kitty following closely after him, to see that no mischief ensued.

In this way, they hurried along the lobby, where Philip got open the street-door, and darted out with such rapidity that he ran against a tall man who chanced to be passing at the time, and who instantly caught hold of him. Before his captor, walked two other persons, preceded by a link-boy, and the latter hearing the noise, turned round, and threw his light full upon the party. The persons in advance were the miser and his daughter, who were returning from Lady Brabazon's, and the tall man who was no other than Jacob Post.

At this moment, Randulph rushed forth; but on seeing the miser and his daughter, he halted in dismay, which was not diminished as Kitty Conway came up and caught hold of his arm. It was an embarrassing situation certainly, and Randulph was so confounded that he could not utter a word.

Jacob, meanwhile, having discovered the prize he had caught, lost no time in announcing his good luck.

"Look here, sir!" he cried, triumphantly; "look at your miserly nephew! I have him fast enough. Look at the clothes he has on. Mayhap he'll deny himself now. Look at him, I say, sir! and satisfy yourself that it's him, for he'll outswear me afterwards if you don't."

"What! Philip!" cried the miser, "is it really you?"

"It is, sir," replied Philip. "And if you will order your servant to release me, I will explain how I came to be here, and in this dress. I have been put in peril of my life by Randulph Crew, who stands there with his mistress."

"Release him, Jacob," said the miser.

"I'd rather you'd let me take him to Saint James's Roundhouse," replied Jacob; "I'm sure it's the fittest place for him."

"Do as I bid you, rascal!" cried Scarve, authoritatively. "Now then, what is the meaning of all this, Philip?"

"Do not inquire further, father," cried Hilda, trembling violently. "Come away, I beseech you."

Seeing that Randulph was unable to speak, Kitty Conway advanced towards the miser.

"I can explain what has happened in a moment," she said.

"Father!" said Hilda, in a determined tone, "if you will not accompany me, I will walk forward by myself."

"I'm ready to go with you," said Jacob.

"Well, well, I'm coming," replied the miser—"some other time, nephew—some other time."

As the miser and his daughter moved off in one direction, Philip, fearful of the consequences of remaining, ran off in the other. At this moment, Trussell and Sir Singleton appeared at the door.

"Well, have you got rid of him?" cried the former.

"Look where he runs," laughed Kitty. "Who do you think chanced to be passing at the very time we came forth?"

"Perhaps the miser and his daughter," said Trussell.

"A good guess," replied Kitty.

"The devil!" exclaimed Trussell—"and they saw you with my nephew? Why, this is worse than the Folly on the Thames!"

"Far worse!" groaned Randulph. "My hopes are now utterly destroyed!"

"I don't understand you," said Kitty; "but come into the house."

"No," replied Randulph, bitterly; "and I would I had never entered it."

"For Heaven's sake, Randulph, consider what you are about," cried Trussell;—"this rudeness to a pretty woman, who has shown you so much kindness! I blush for you."

"I am no longer master of myself," cried Randulph.

And murmuring some apology to Kitty, he bade her good night, and walked off with his uncle.

"Well, here's a pretty conclusion to the supper," said Kitty to the old beau. "I don't know whether to laugh or cry; but perhaps I'd better laugh. Randulph Crew is an odd young man, but he's very handsome, and that makes up for a thousand singularities."

"He has very bad taste, Kitty," replied Sir Singleton, "for he's blind to your attractions, and adores Hilda Scarve."

"So it seems," she replied, in a tone of pique. "And now, good night, Sir Singleton."

"Not just yet, sweet Kitty," he cried, following her. "I've a great deal to say to you. I shall make you another handsome present to-morrow."

"Then keep what you have to say till then," she rejoined, slapping the door unceremoniously in his face.

CHAPTER IV.

RANDULPH'S CAREER OF GAIETY—ABEL'S REMARKS UPON IT TO MR. JUKES.

Randulph's reflections on awaking the next morning were not of the most enviable kind; and bitterly did he reproach himself for his imprudence. Fate seemed determined to place an insurmountable bar between him and the object of his hopes, and he, at last, in some degree, consoled himself, as many others have done before him, by thinking that he was rather the victim of necessity than of his own misconduct.

Throughout the early part of the day, he continued in a state of deep depression, from which Trussell in vain tried to rouse him. As to Abel, having ascertained from Mr. Jukes the cause of his despondency, he forebore to question him about it, and even feigned not to notice it.

It required some little persuasion to induce him to dine with Lady Brabazon that day; but once in the atmosphere of her ladyship's wit and pleasantry, he soon revived. Divining, with true feminine tact, the cause of his dejection, she speedily dissipated it by her fine powers of raillery; and to his own surprise, he passed a very agreeable evening, and quitted the house more than half in love with its fair mistress.

Satisfied of the impression she had produced, Lady Brabazon did not fail to improve it. She included him in all her parties for a month to come, and took care to involve him in such a round of gaiety and fashionable dissipation, that he could not by any means extricate himself from it. The effect of this was soon manifest in his habits, in his attire, and in his manners; and though the change was mightily approved of by Trussell, it was viewed in a very different light by his more sagacious and far-sighted uncle.

"Well, Jukes," said the latter, one day, to his butler, "my first opinion of Randulph is fully borne out by his conduct."

"Why, he is rather gay, to be sure," replied Mr. Jukes. "But I don't give him up yet. Young men, as Mr. Trussell says, will be young men."

"But there's no occasion for them to be young rakes," said Abel, sharply. "My nephew is a sad dissipated dog. Lady Brabazon seems to have got him completely into her toils."

"Ah! she's a dangerous woman!" said Mr. Jukes, lifting up his hands—"a dangerous woman!"

"And the pretty actress, Kitty Conway?" pursued Abel. "He sups with her occasionally, eh?"

"I fear he does, sir," replied Mr. Jukes.

"*Fear*—you *know* he does, sirrah," cried Abel. "Why attempt to equivocate? What masquerade were they talking of at breakfast this morning?"

"What, haven't you heard of it, sir?" replied the butler. "It's a grand masquerade to be held at Ranelagh on Thursday. All the world is going there; and, amongst others, my graceless nephew, Crackenthorpe Cripps."

"What! in his master's clothes, as before?" said Abel.

"No, sir," replied Mr. Jukes, "as harlequin."

"Harlequin!" echoed Abel, "that will suit him exactly. And I hope the silly widow he is paying his addresses to will go as columbine."

"Precisely what she means to do, sir," laughed Mr. Jukes.

"Get me a domino before Thursday, Jukes; I'll go to this masquerade myself," said Abel.

"Why, sir, you're becoming as great a rake as your nephew," returned Mr. Jukes, laughingly. "If I might be permitted, I should like to go with you to Ranelagh. I wish to have an eye on Crackenthorpe. Ah, sir! our nephews are sad plagues to us—sad plagues!"

"My nephew shall not plague me much longer," replied Abel. "I'll give him another month, and then——"

"You'll give him another after that," interrupted the butler.

"No I wont," rejoined Abel; "I wont give him a day, nor an hour longer. I've spent nearly a hundred pounds upon him already—upon his dress—his amusements—his profligacies. No, I'll pack him off into the country. By-the-by, his mother has written to say she is coming to town. I've endeavoured to dissuade her from the step, but she says she is uneasy about Randulph."

Well, I hope she'll come," returned Mr. Jukes; "I'm sure she's wanted just now."

"I've no wish to see her," said Abel, sternly. "There has been a coolness between us for years."

"Then the sooner it is got rid of the better," rejoined the butler. "Don't let the grave close over it. Her presence, I think, is very desirable. And on her son's account, as well as yours, I'm glad she's coming."

"Don't calculate upon it," cried Abel, "for I don't think it likely. If I can hinder it, I will."

"While we're on confidential matters, sir," said Mr. Jukes, "may I ask how Miss Scarve is getting on?"

"Well enough, for aught I know," rejoined Abel, testily; "I've neither heard from her, nor seen her, since my visit to her father. And now I wish to be alone. Take care to get me a domino before Thursday."

CHAPTER V.

RANDULPH RECEIVES A LETTER FROM HIS MOTHER—ITS EFFECT UPON HIM—HIS GOOD RESOLUTIONS DEFEATED BY TRUSSELL.

Randulph's mother had only written to him twice since his arrival in town,—for in those days ladies, especially country ladies, were neither so active nor so exacting in their correspondence, as at present,—when one day, just as he was sallying forth on a pleasurable expedition with Trussell, a letter was delivered to him by Mr. Jukes, bearing her superscription. Glancing at it with some misgiving, he would have broken the seal, but Trussell, noticing his reluctance, and guessing the cause, advised him to put it in his pocket, and read it on his return at night.

"Good advice," he said, laughingly, "it is all the better for keeping,—its chief recommendation being that it is just as effectual a month afterwards as at the moment given."

"If it had been a billet from Lady Brabazon, or Kitty Conway, he would have opened it without hesitation," remarked Abel, who stood by.

"To be sure," replied Trussell, "and he would have done quite right, because such a note would require immediate attention, and as a man of breeding he could not leave it a moment unanswered."

"And I am to infer, therefore, that a mother's letter is to be put aside," rejoined Abel.

"Not exactly, sir," laughed Trussell; "but when one knows that it contains a lecture, one naturally feels indisposed to read it. That I suppose you can understand."

"I understand no such thing," replied Abel, tartly; "but I perfectly understand how excessive addiction to pleasure injures the best principles and chills the warmest affections. Filial love and duty have little influence when dissipation has obtained the sway."

"I acknowledge the justness of your rebuke, uncle," said Randulph, "and will read the letter instantly."

"On no account," rejoined Abel; "pursue your first impulse. It will 'keep,' as my brother says, till to-night, and you may possibly be then in a better frame of mind for its perusal. When you have possessed yourself of its contents, I shall be glad to be made acquainted with them." And turning away, he retreated to the library.

It was late when Randulph returned, after a day spent in gaiety, as usual, and on retiring to his own room, his first business was to take out his mother's letter. Opening it, he eagerly scanned its contents, which ran thus:—

"MY DEAR SON,—The accounts I have received of your mode of life have given me inexpressible uneasiness. A mother's hopes are perhaps seldom fulfilled, and my expectations, I now feel, were too sanguine ever to be realized. Still, I did not anticipate such complete disappointment as I have experienced. With your generous nature and quick impulses, I should not have been surprised at your being led into slight indiscretions; but that you should have plunged so deeply into dissipation, and connected yourself with persons so very profligate, grieves me to the heart. Your conduct I believe is mainly attributable to bad advice, and therefore, in some degree, to be excused. Your uncle Trussell is not without principle, and has a kindly disposition; but the enjoyment of the moment is all he cares for, and he is utterly reckless of consequences. I thought I had sufficiently guarded you against him, but I now see my error, and feel that I ought never to have introduced you to society so dangerous. My reliance was in your uncle Abel. I persuaded myself you would discern the good that lies beneath the surface of that excellent man, and anticipated much from your introduction to him. Not the least, therefore, of my affliction is the knowledge that you have forfeited his good opinion. Let me hope it is not too late to regain it.

"In your first letter you spoke of Hilda Scarve in terms of the highest admiration. I have been informed from another source that she is as highly gifted as beautiful, and I confess it would have delighted me to see you united to her. I am aware there are obstacles in the way; but they might, perhaps, have been removed. Here again your misconduct, or, to give it its mildest term, your imprudence, has been prejudicial to you.

"On another point—namely, your interview with the mysterious individual beneath the cloisters of Westminster Abbey, I do not deem it prudent to write.

"In conclusion, my dear son, I beseech you to pause in your headlong career, to abandon the worthless society you have formed, and to place yourself under the guidance of your uncle Abel. He can save you. And that he may do so is the fervent prayer of "Your most affectionate mother,

"SOPHIA CREW."

Randulph read this letter over and over again, and each time with fresh self-reproaches. He thought his mother viewed his indiscretions in too serious a light, but he could not disguise from himself that her fears were well grounded. What chiefly affected him, however, was the passage referring to Hilda, and its reperusal caused him to pace his chamber with agitated steps.

At last he became calmer, and sought his couch; but he could not sleep, and in the morning arose feverish and unrefreshed. His uncles were at the breakfast-table before him; but though both noticed the dejected and haggard appearance, neither commented upon it. On the contrary, Trussell was livelier than usual, and rattled away about the masquerade to be given at Ranelagh on the following day, dilating upon the amusement to be expected at it. All at once, Randulph broke silence.

"I do not intend to go to the masquerade, uncle," he said.

"Not go!" exclaimed Trussell, laying down a piece of broiled ham which he was conveying to his mouth. "Not go!—why not, in the name of wonder?"

Abel eyed his nephew narrowly.

"I have been too much at such places of late," replied Randulph.

Trussell burst into a derisive laugh.

"I see how it is," he said; "you have received a dose of good counsel from your mother, and are labouring from its effects."

"I trust I shall profit by the advice I have received," replied Randulph; "and as the first step towards it, I mean to abstain from the masquerade at Ranelagh."

Abel fastened his grey eyes upon him, as if he would read his soul, but he made no remark.

"Well, well, do as you please, my dear boy," said Trussell—"do as you please. I sha'n't attempt to persuade you. But a moment's reflection will convince you that your mother is not in a condition to judge of your conduct. She can only learn what you are doing by report; and report always exaggerates. Her alarm is quite natural. You are a devilish handsome fellow—very much liked by the women—very much courted by persons of quality. People in the country are terribly afraid of pretty women and great folks; but you know that both are perfectly harmless. *My* only uneasiness about you," he added, with a dry cough, and a side glance at his brother, "is, that your means are rather inadequate to your expenses. But you may be richer one of these days."

"I see little prospect of it," muttered Abel.

"I think there is every prospect of his making a good match, sir—but that is neither here nor there," replied Trussell.

"I hope you don't allude to Beau Villiers' cast-off mistress, Lady Brabazon," said Abel. "I would rather he married Kitty Conway than that worthless woman. There is at least some honesty about the actress."

"Do not be apprehensive on that score, uncle," rejoined Randulph; "I am not likely to be so duped. My eyes are opened to my folly."

"How long will they continue so?" sneered Abel. "Satiety begets loathing, but with a fresh appetite you will begin anew."

"I hope he will," said Trussell, "for I cannot, for the life of me, discover the harm he has committed."

"It would surprise me if you did," observed Abel, contemptuously.

The conversation here dropped, and the party continued their breakfast in silence. At its close, the elder uncle quitted the room.

"You were somewhat rash in forming the resolution you have just announced, Randulph," observed Trussell, as soon as they were alone: "I didn't like to say so before my brother, but I felt quite sure of your going to the masquerade, notwithstanding your declaration to the contrary."

"You are mistaken, sir," replied Randulph, with the air of a person who has come to an unalterable determination.

"No, I am not," rejoined Trussell, smiling; "and when I tell you that Hilda Scarve will be there, I rather fancy you will acknowledge the correctness of my remark."

"Ah! that alters the case, indeed," exclaimed Randulph. "But are you sure of what you tell me?"

"As sure as we are now sitting together," replied Trussell. "She is going there under the escort of her relation, Sir Norfolk Salusbury."

"Then of course I must go," cried Randulph. "I wouldn't lose the chance of meeting her for the world."

"But you forget—you have been too much at such places of late," jeered Trussell.

"One more visit can make no difference," rejoined Randulph.

"But there's no knowing what it may lead to," pursued Trussell. "Recollect, your eyes are now open to your folly—ha! ha!"

"Laugh as much as you please, uncle," replied Randulph. "I do not go to see the masquerade—but to meet Hilda."

"Well, I'm glad of your determination, on whatever plea you put it," rejoined Trussell, seriously.

At this juncture, Abel re-appeared.

"Well, Randulph," he said, regarding him—"still of the same mind?—No masquerade to-morrow, eh?"

"I fear you will have little confidence in me in future, when I tell you I have decided upon going," replied Randulph, colouring with shame.

"I expected as much," replied Abel, coldly. "I knew you would not be proof against your uncle's powers of persuasion."

"Indeed, sir, I have not persuaded him," said Trussell. "Have I, Randulph?"

"You have not," was the reply.

"Then let me give you one piece of advice, Randulph," observed Abel. "Don't boast of your good resolutions until you have given them a trial."

CHAPTER VI.

THE FAIR THOMASINE'S VISIT TO HILDA—HER MYSTERIOUS COMMUNICATION—IN WHAT WAY, AND BY WHOM, THE ATTEMPT TO CARRY OFF HILDA WAS PREVENTED—THE MISER BURIES HIS TREASURE IN THE CELLAR.

During all this time, the miser continued to lead precisely the same life as before. Notwithstanding his application to Abel Beechcroft, Jacob Post had not quitted his master's service; for with all their bickerings and disagreements, the porter was strongly attached to him. A word, moreover, from Hilda, had turned the scale, and decided Jacob upon staying. Things therefore, went on in their usual way. Diggs had contrived, by producing deeds and other documents, which appeared regularly executed, to convince the miser that his nephew's account of his circumstances was correct. But the project of the alliance was dropped, or suffered to remain in abeyance, and Hilda endured no further annoyance respecting it.

But it must not be imagined she was perfectly tranquil. On the contrary, she was haunted by the recollection of Randulph, who had made a much deeper impression on her heart than she had at first supposed; and though she had made the strongest efforts to banish his image from her thoughts, they were unsuccessful. The very jealousy she had experienced increased the flame; and her casual encounter with him, as she was returning from Lady Brabazon's, tended to keep it alive. She saw nothing of him, and heard nothing of him, except that her father now and then told her, with a bitter sneer, that he had become excessively dissipated. But she now began to find excuses for him, and blamed herself for having acted harshly towards him on their last interview. Her solitary life, too, contributed to foster her passion. She had little to dwell on besides him, and his image being most frequently presented to her imagination, insensibly became linked with her affections.

One morning, when her father was from home, and she was sitting in her own room, Jacob tapped at the door, and informed her that the mercer's daughter from over the way, Miss Thomasine Deacle, was below, and begged to speak with her.

She instantly came down stairs, and found the young lady in question awaiting her, and very finely dressed, being attired in a red and yellow damask gown, with a red satin stomacher, crossed with ribands of the same colour, great bunches of ribands at her ruffles, and a pretty little fly-cap similarly bedizened. She was gazing round the room with the greatest curiosity, but on seeing Hilda, rushed towards her, and wringing her hands, exclaimed, in tones of the deepest commiseration, "And is it in this miserable place that loveliness like yours is immured! What a marble-hearted tyrant your father must be?"

Hilda looked at a loss to comprehend the meaning of this address.

"I beg pardon," pursued the fair Thomasine; "but I am so horror-stricken by the sight of these naked walls, and this desolate apartment, that I may, perchance, have expressed myself too strongly. Oh! how can you exist here, Miss Scarve?"

"I contrive to do so, strange as it may appear," replied Hilda, smiling.

"This is a moment I have for months sighed for," cried the fair Thomasine, falling into a theatrical attitude. "I have longed to commune with you unrestrainedly—to form a strict friendship with you. You will soon understand me, as I understand you. Yes, Hilda Scarve and Thomasine Deacle, however disproportionate their rank, will be constant and attached friends. From this moment I devote myself to you. We have both many feelings in common. We both love, and have both been disappointed; or rather, our affections have been betrayed."

"I must beg you to cease this absurd strain, Miss Deacle, if the interview is to be continued," replied Hilda, somewhat haughtily. "I have neither loved, nor been disappointed."

"Nay, fear me not," rejoined the fair Thomasine. "Your secrets will be as secure in my bosom as in your own. I am a woman, and know of what a woman's heart is composed. I deeply sympathize with you. I know how tenderly you love Randulph Crew, and how unworthy he has proved himself of your regard."

"Really, Miss Deacle," cried Hilda, blushing, "I cannot suffer you to talk in this way."

"I only do so to show you that you may have entire confidence in me," replied the fair Thomasine. "Ah! Mr. Crew is very handsome, very handsome, indeed. I do not wonder at his inspiring a strong passion."

"You are mistaken in supposing he has inspired me with one," rejoined Hilda, somewhat piqued. "I hope you do not come from him."

"Oh, no," replied the fair Thomasine; "but if I can do aught to forward the affair—if I can convey any message to him—command me."

"It is time to put an end to this nonsense," said Hilda. "If you have nothing else to speak about to me, except Mr. Randulph Crew, I must wish you a good morning."

"One object in my coming hither, Miss Scarve, I will frankly confess, was to make your acquaintance, and I trust, to form a lasting friendship with you," replied the fair Thomasine, somewhat discomposed. "But my chief motive," she added, assuming a mysterious look, and lowering her voice to those deep tones in which fearful intelligence is announced in a melo-drama, "was to inform you that an attempt will be made to carry you off to-night!"

"Carry me off!" exclaimed Hilda, alarmed.

"Ay, carry you off!" repeated the fair Thomasine. "Dreadful, isn't it? But it is what all heroines, like ourselves, are subject to. I may not tell you who gave me the intelligence, but you may rely upon it. Most likely you have some suspicion of the hateful contriver of the base design. Our sex are seldom deceived in such matters. I was bound to secrecy, but I could not keep the matter from you. Whatever happens, I must not be implicated. Promise me I shall not be so."

"You shall not," replied Hilda.

"And oh, Miss Scarve," pursued the fair Thomasine, "to appreciate my regard for you—to understand me thoroughly—you must know—though I tremble to mention it—that you are my rival—yes, my rival! Your matchless charms have estranged the affections of my beloved and once-devoted Peter Pokerich. Still, I feel no resentment against you—but, on the contrary, I admire you beyond expression. A time may come when I may be useful to you; and then forget not your humble, but faithful friend, Thomasine Deacle."

"I will not—I will not," replied Hilda, who began to entertain some doubts as to her companion's sanity. "I am greatly obliged by your information, and will not fail to profit by it. Good morning."

"Farewell!" exclaimed the fair Thomasine, pathetically. "I fear I am imperfectly understood."

Hilda assured her to the contrary, and, summoning Jacob, he ushered her to the door.

As soon as the fair Thomasine had departed, Hilda acquainted her aunt with the intelligence she had received. Mrs. Clinton was inclined to put little faith in it, but recommended that their relation, Sir Norfolk Salusbury, should be consulted on the subject. To this, however, Hilda objected, and Jacob Post was summoned to the conference.

"Don't say a word about it to any one—not even to master," said the porter, on being appealed to; "leave the affair to me, and I'll warrant you, Master Philip Frewin—for I've no doubts it's him—"sha'n't wish to renew the attempt. Go to bed just as usual, and think no more of the matter. You shall hear all about it next mornin'."

"But had you not better have some assistance, Jacob?" said Hilda. "Such attempts are always made with sufficient force to ensure their execution."

"I want no assistance, Miss," replied Jacob—"not I. Half a dozen of 'em may come if they choose—but they sha'n't go back as they came, I'll promise 'em."

"I think you may rely upon Jacob, niece," observed Mrs. Clinton.

Hilda thought so too, and it was therefore resolved that nothing should be said to the miser on the subject, but that the porter should keep watch in his own way.

Shortly afterwards, Mr. Scarve came home. The day passed off as usual, and Hilda and her aunt retired to rest early—a signal of intelligence passing between them and Jacob as they withdrew.

It so happened, on this particular night, that the miser, who was busy with his papers and accounts, signified his intention of sitting up late, and ordered Jacob to place another farthing candle before him, to be lighted when the first was done. This arrangement not suiting Jacob at all, he declined obeying the order, hoping his master would go to bed; but he was mistaken. The miser continued busily employed until his candle had burnt into the socket, when, finding Jacob had neglected to provide him with another, he went grumblingly to the cupboard for it. Hearing him stir, Jacob, who was on the alert, entered the room.

"Do you know it's eleven o'clock, sir?" he said. "It's time to go to bed."

"Go to bed yourself, you careless rascal!" rejoined the miser, angrily. "I told you I was going to sit up, and ordered you to get me another candle. But you neglect everything—everything."

"No, I don't," replied Jacob, gruffly. "You're growin' wasteful, and it's my duty to check you. You're hurtin' your eyes by sittin' up so late. Come, go to bed."

"What the devil's the meaning of this, rascal?" cried the miser, sharply and suspiciously. "You've some object in view, and want to get me out of the way. I shall sit up late—perhaps all night."

Seeing his master resolute, Jacob, after uttering a few inaudible words, withdrew.

In another hour, he partly opened the door, and popped his head into the room. The miser was still hard at work.

"Past twelve o'clock, and a cloudy mornin'!" he cried, mimicking the hoarse tones of a watchman.

"What! still up!" cried the miser. "Go to bed directly."

"No, I sha'n't," replied Jacob, pushing the door wide open, and striding into the room; "it's not safe to leave you up. Them accounts can just as well be settled to-morrow. Come," he added, marching to the table, and taking up the candle, "I'll see you to bed."

"Set down the candle, rascal!" cried the miser, rising in a fury—"set it down instantly, or I'll be the death of you."

Jacob reluctantly complied, and looked hard at him, scratching his head as he did so.

"I see you've something on your mind," cried the miser, fiercely. "Confess at once that you intend to rob and murder me. Confess it, and I'll forgive you."

"I've nothin' to confess," rejoined Jacob. "It's merely regard for your welfare as keeps me up. If you'd be advised by me, you'll go to bed—but if you wont, you must take the consequences."

"What consequences, sirrah?" cried the miser, angrily. "Are you master here, or am I?"

"You are," replied Jacob—"more's the pity. If anythin' happens, it's not my fault. I've warned you."

"Stay, rascal!" vociferated the miser, who felt somewhat uneasy—"what do you mean?—what do you apprehend?'

"I sha'n't tell you," replied Jacob, doggedly. "I can be as close as you. You'll know if you'll stay up long enough." So saying, he disappeared.

The miser was seriously alarmed. Jacob's mysterious conduct was wholly incomprehensible. He had never acted so before, and after debating with himself what it would be best to do, Mr. Scarve resolved to fetch his sword and remain on the watch. Accordingly, he crept up stairs, and possessed himself of the weapon, and as he passed the ladies' chamber, on his return, he heard them stirring within it, while the voice of Mrs. Clinton, issuing from the keyhole, said, "Jacob, have they been here?"

"Not yet," replied the miser in a whisper, which he tried to make as like the porter's gruff voice as possible.

Fully satisfied that he had discovered a plot, but fearful of being subjected to further interrogations, which might lead to his discovery, if he stayed longer, the miser hurried down stairs, muttering as he went—"Here's a pretty piece of work! That rascal, Jacob, is at the bottom of it all. I'll discharge him to-morrow morning. But first, to find out what it means. How lucky I chanced to sit up! It's quite providential."

Resuming his seat at the table, he placed the sword before him, and went on with his accounts. The door was left partially ajar, so that, being very quick of hearing, he could detect the slightest sound.

One o'clock, however, arrived, and the house remained undisturbed. Another half hour passed by—still no one came. His second candle had burned low, and he was calculating with himself whether he should light a third, or remain in the dark, when footsteps were distinctly heard on the stairs. He snatched up the sword and rushed to the door, where he encountered Jacob, with his crabstick in his hand.

"Oh! I've caught you, rascal, have I?" he cried, seizing him, and placing his sword at his throat.

"Leave go!" said Jacob, dashing him off—"Don't you hear 'em? They've come to carry off your daughter." And snatching the candle from him, darted up stairs.

The miser's house consisted of two stories, exclusive of the attics. His own bed-room and that of his daughter lay on the second floor. The attics were wholly unoccupied and filled with old lumber, which no one but himself would have harboured. The doors were kept constantly locked, and the windows boarded up. But it was evident that the parties who had got into the house had effected an entrance from the roof. Indeed, Jacob soon after found this to be the case. On reaching the landing, he perceived three masked figures descending the stairs. The foremost of them, a slightly built person, rather gaily attired and provided with a lantern, turned to his companion and said, "'Pon rep! we're discovered, and had better beat a retreat."

The person behind him, however, who was a stout built fellow, seemed to be of a different opinion.

"No, curse it, no!" he cried, "we wont go back empty-handed. He is but one man, and we'll carry her off in spite of him. Lead us to Miss Scarve's chamber directly, sirrah!" he cried to Jacob, "or we'll cut your throat."

"Oppose us not, my good fellow," said the first speaker; "we mean you no harm, 'pon rep! Our business is with your young mistress. Conduct us to her chamber, and you shall have a crown for your trouble.

"You shall have a cracked crown for yours!" cried Jacob, bringing down his crabstick with such force, that if it had hit its mark, it would have more than realized the threat. As it was, a quick spring saved the party against whom it was aimed. He let fall the lantern, and ran up stairs. The person behind him, uttering a tremendous oath, drew his sword, and made a thrust at Jacob, who parried it with his crabstick, and in his turn dealt his assailant a blow on the arm that disabled him. Howling with pain, and venting the most terrible imprecations, the fellow turned and fled, and the third person, seeing the fate that had attended his companions, followed their example. Darting up stairs, they passed through an open door in the attics, scrambled over a heap of lumber, and got through a small dormer window.

It was fortunate for the fugitives that Jacob, who was close at their heels, got entangled in the lumber, or they might not have escaped so easily. When he extricated himself, they were gone, nor could he discover any trace of them. It appeared probable that they had passed over the roof of the adjoining house, and dropped upon some leads, whence they had gained a passage which was concealed from view. Thinking it unnecessary to pursue them further, Jacob fastened the window, and descended to the lower part of the house, where he found the miser, together with Hilda and her aunt.

"Well, have you secured them?" cried Mr. Scarve. "Hilda has told me what it all means."

"No," replied Jacob, "but I have fairly routed them."

"Who was the leader?" cried the miser—"Randulph Crew?"

"More likely your nephew," returned Jacob. "But I can't swear to any one. There was three of 'em, and they was all masked."

"I owe you a thousand thanks for my preservation, Jacob," said Hilda.

"You may now rest in safety," replied Jacob. "I've fastened the window, and I warrant me they wont make a second attempt."

Repeating her thanks, Hilda then retired with her aunt.

"Have you no idea who it was?" said the miser.

"Not the least," returned the other; "and I'm only sorry I couldn't identify Mr. Philip Frewin."

The miser made no reply, and whatever his suspicions might be, he kept them to himself. The attempt, however, alarmed him on another account. If his house, which he had considered securely barricaded, could be so easily entered, other equally lawless characters, and whose aim might be plunder, could obtain admission. He had large sums with him, for with the true avaricious spirit, he loved to see and to handle his gold, and not even the loss of interest could induce him to part with it. Resolving to hide his treasure where it could not be discovered, on the following night, when he concluded all were at rest, he crept stealthily down stairs with two heavy money-bags on his back. With some effort, for the lock was very rusty, he opened the door of an old disused wine cellar. There was nothing in it but an empty barrel, which lay in one corner.

Having looked anxiously round, to see that he was not watched, he laid down the bags, and crept up stairs for two more. These were heavier than the first, and he laid them down with as little noise as possible. He had to go back a third time, and returned equally laden. He then repaired to a small coal-hole adjoining, where was deposited a scanty supply of fuel—which, scanty as it was, he intended should last for many months to come—and provided himself with a shovel and an old broom. A fourth ascent supplied him with a box, in which he placed the bags, and he then commenced operations upon the floor of the cellar.

With great difficulty—for he worked with the utmost caution—

he got out a few bricks, and then his task became easier. Having made a hole sufficiently deep to hold the box, he deposited it within it, and covering it over with earth, restored the bricks, as well as he could, to their places—jumping upon them, and pressing them down with his feet. Lastly, he swept all the loose earth together, and tossed it into the empty barrel.

More than an hour was thus employed; and when all was over, he leaned against the wall in a complete state of exhaustion. While thus resting himself, his eye wandered to the door, which was slightly ajar, and he thought he perceived some one behind it. Instantly darting towards it, he threw it wide open, and beheld Jacob.

"Villain!" he shrieked, raising his shovel—"I'll murder you!"

"No you wont," replied Jacob, dauntlessly.

"What have you seen, rascal?" cried the miser, trembling with fury. "Tell me what you've seen!—speak!"

"Put down the shovel, and then I will, but not other*wise*," answered Jacob. "Well, then," he added, as the request was complied with, "I've seen you bury a box."

"You have?" screamed the miser. "And you know what it contains?"

"I can guess," replied Jacob. "Some one always sees these things; and it is well for you, and those to come after you, that you were seen by an honest man like me."

"An honest man!" cried the miser, ironically. "Such a one would be asleep in his bed at this hour, and not prying into his master's affairs."

"And what should his master be doing, eh?" retorted Jacob. "Shouldn't he be in bed, too, instead o' creepin' about his house as if he was doin' some guilty deed, and afraid o' being detected? Which is worse, him as buries money, or him as looks on while it's buried? I tell you what it is, sir—in my opinion, he who acts so deserves to be robbed. Nay, I'm not goin' to rob you. Don't be afraid! But, I repeat, you deserve to be robbed. What was money made for?—not to be buried there. Spend it, and give yourself comfort. You haven't many years to live; and then you may be put where you've put your gold. But I preach to a deaf ear."

While Jacob was speaking, the miser remained leaning on the shovel, as if considering what he should do. At length, he groaned out—"Well, you've baffled my design, Jacob, Dig up the chest."

"No I wont," was the surly reply.

"You wont?"

"No," replied Jacob, "I'll not be art or part in anythin' of the sort. He as hides may find. Since you've buried the treasure, e'en let it rest. The secret's safe with me."

"Will you swear it?" cried the miser, eagerly.

"I will, if that'll content you," replied Jacob

"I'll trust you, then," rejoined Scarve.

"Only because you can't help yourself," muttered Jacob.

The miser took no notice of the remark, but, quitting the cellar, locked the door, and fastened the padlock outside.

"You'll never enter this place without my leave, Jacob," he cried—"nor betray my secret?"

"I've sworn it!" replied the porter, gruffly. And he turned off into his own room, while the miser went up stairs with a heavy heart.

Some days after this occurrence, Sir Norfolk Salusbury called upon Hilda. The Welsh baronet was rather a favourite with the miser, for though they had few qualities in common, yet Sir Norfolk's peculiar character suited him. He never asked a favour —never wanted to borrow money—never required any refreshment. All these circumstances recommended him to the miser's good opinion. With Hilda he was a still greater favourite. She liked his stately, old-fashioned manner; and though she could have dispensed with some of his formality, she preferred it to the familiarity of the few persons of quality whom she had encountered.

On the present occasion, after much circumlocution, Sir Norfolk informed the miser that there was to be a masquerade—or, as he termed it, "a grand assemblage of personated characters in masks" —in a few days, at Ranelagh, and he begged to be permitted to take his daughter to it.

"It is a useless expense," muttered the miser.

"I confess I should like to go very much," said Hilda. "I have never seen a masquerade; and I am told those at Ranelagh are magnificent."

"This will be unusually magnificent," replied Sir Norfolk; "and as you have expressed a wish on the subject, I will procure you a masquerading habit, and a ticket, if your father will allow you to go."

"In that case, I see no objection," said the miser, "provided I am not obliged to accompany her. I abominate such fooleries."

"I will gladly undertake the curation of her," said Sir Norfolk.

"And you are the only man I would trust her with, Sir Norfolk," rejoined Scarve. "I know you will take as much care of her as I could take myself."

Sir Norfolk acknowledged the compliment by a stately bow. And it was then arranged to Hilda's great satisfaction, that a court dressmaker should wait upon her on the following day, to prepare her a dress for the masquerade. All were pleased with the arrangement; and the miser was in high glee that he had obliged his daughter without putting himself to trouble or expense; while Sir Norfolk was equally gratified in being able to afford pleasure to his fair cousin.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PROGRESS OF MR. CRIPPS'S LOVE AFFAIR—MR. RATHBONE APPEARS ON THE SCENE—STRATAGEM OF THE VALET—MR. JUKES VISITS THE WIDOW.

Mr. Cripps still continued unremitting in his attentions to Mrs. Nettleship, and had made such progress in her affections, that on Mr. Rathbone's return from the country—an event which occurred about ten days after the memorable visit to Marylebone Gardens—she told him she feared she could not fulfil her engagement with him, and besought him to allow her to break it off. But Mr. Rathbone declared he would do no such thing, and reminded her of a trifling penalty of three thousand pounds which was attached to the violation of the marriage contract on her part. He then upbraided her warmly with inconstancy; recalled to her recollection the professions of regard she had once expressed for him; and concluded by vowing to be the death of his rival. Mrs. Nettleship bore his reproaches with the utmost composure; but on hearing his final threat she uttered a faint scream, and sank overcome by emotion into a chair. Mr. Rathbone offered no assistance; but clapping his hat fiercely on his head, and flourishing his stick in a menacing manner, hurried out of the room.

"Oh, la!" exclaimed Mrs. Nettleship, getting up as soon as he was gone, "there will be a duel—a sanguinary duel—and I shall have caused it, wretched woman that I am!"

But no duel ensued—perhaps to the widow's disappointment. On being made acquainted with the precise terms of the contract, of which he had hitherto been kept in ignorance, Mr. Cripps looked very grave, and advised her on no account to come to a decided rupture with Mr. Rathbone.

"But the three thousand pounds can make no difference to you, Mr. Willars," said Mrs. Nettleship—"better pay it, and have done with him."

"On no account, my angel," replied her admirer. "We must manage to outwit him and obtain his consent."

And strange to say, the cunning valet did contrive, not only not to quarrel with his rival, but even to make a friend of him. Foreseeing that Mr. Rathbone would infallibly find out who he was, and expose him, he determined to be beforehand with him, and he therefore told the widow that he had concocted a scheme, by which he was certain of outwitting her affianced suitor; but it was necessary to its success that he should assume the part of his own valet, whose name was Crackenthorpe Cripps.

"I don't like the idea of your being taken for a walet at all, Mr. Willars," said Mrs. Nettleship—"and I can't see what purpose it 'll answer."

'It is indispensable to my scheme, my angel," replied Mr. Cripps. "You know these things are always so managed in the comedies, and they are the best models one can follow. On the stage, you constantly find masters putting on their servants' clothes, and *vice versâ*. And only think, if we can trick Rathbone out of the three thousand."

"Ah, that would be something, certainly," said Mrs. Nettleship. "I must have been a fool to enter into such an engagement. But at that time I thought I loved him."

"You must indeed have been wanting in your usual judgment, sweetheart," replied Mr. Cripps; "but you hadn't seen me. The only course now left is to out-manœuvre the insensible dolt. The idea of personating my valet was suggested to me by the address of the drunken old fellow we met in Marylebone Gardens."

"I recollect," replied Mrs. Nettleship. "He called you his nephew—said your name was Cripps, and that you were Mr. Willars's walet. I remember it as well as if it had happened yesterday."

"Disagreeable occurrences always dwell in one's remembrance longer than pleasant ones," rejoined the valet, forcing a laugh. "You must introduce me to Mr. Rathbone as Mr. Cripps. Leave him to find out the rest."

The device worked exactly as its contriver desired and anticipated. Mr. Rathbone was astounded when he learnt that his rival was a valet; and he was so staggered by Mr. Cripps's dress, assurance, and deportment, that he was firmly convinced he was a gentleman in disguise. The inquiries he made only added to his perplexity. He ascertained that Beau Villiers had a valet named Cripps; but the description given of him did not tally with the appearance of Mrs. Nettleship's lover, and at last he became satisfied that the interloper was the master, and not the man.

"I tell you what, Mrs. Nettleship," he said, one day, "this gay admirer of yours isn't what he pretends to be."

"Indeed, Mr. Rathbone!" exclaimed the widow, smiling. "What is he, then?"

"A great rake and coxcomb," replied the other, angrily. "He's his own master. No, I don't mean that exactly—he's himself disguised as his walet—that's it."

"What *do* you mean, Mr. Rathbone?" simpered the widow. "I declare I don't understand you."

"Why, I mean that this walet—this Mr. Cripps, as you suppose him, is no walet at all," replied Rathbone. "He's Mr. Willars, the great beau."

"Oh, you're entirely mistaken, Mr. Rathbone," said the widow, smiling.

'I hope he means honourably by you, that's all," sneered

Rathbone. "Ah! here he comes," he added, as Mr. Cripps entered the room. "Your most obedient, Mr. Willars."

"My name is Cripps, sir,—Crackenthorpe Cripps, at your service," replied the valet, with a smirk of satisfaction.

"Poh! poh! nonsense!—don't crack-jaw me," cried Rathbone, "I know better. You can't impose on me, sir. I know a gentleman from a walet when I see him."

"Your opinion is too flattering, sir, to allow me to be angry at it," replied Mr. Cripps, bowing profoundly.

"There!—that bow alone would convict you," cried Rathbone, "whoever saw a walet make his honours in that style?'

"Do me the favour to try my snush," said Mr. Cripps, taking out the beau's handsomest box, which he had borrowed for the occasion.

"Further proof!" exclaimed Rathbone; "look at that snuff-box set with brilliants!—those rings on his fingers! Very like a walet, indeed."

"You shall have it all your own way, sir," said Mr. Cripps, again bowing; "but there's an old gentleman outside, who will tell you you are mistaken."

"An accomplice, I'll be sworn," cried Rathbone. "But I should like to see him." And proceeding to the passage, he returned the next moment with Mr. Jukes, while Mr. Cripps, seating himself, winked significantly at the widow. On entering the room, the old butler glanced round it curiously.

"Well, sir, you look like a servant, at all events," cried Mr. Rathbone. "Pray, who is the individual before us?—who is he?"

"I'm sorry to betray him, because he's my own kinsman," replied Mr. Jukes; "but I cannot suffer him to impose on a respectable lady."

"Who do you say he is?" demanded Rathbone.

"I repeat, I'm sorry to expose him," replied Mr. Jukes; "but the truth must be told. He's my nephew, Crackenthorpe Cripps, chief valet to Mr. Villiers."

"There, sir, I told you my statement would be corroborated," said Mr. Cripps, with a side-glance at the widow.

"Why, does he own that his name is Cripps?" said the butler, in astonishment.

"He would make us believe so," replied Rathbone; "but we know, as yourself, you old deceiver, that it's Willars."

The butler looked thoroughly mystified.

"'Pon rep! this is vastly amusing," said Mr. Cripps, helping himself to a pinch of snuff, and clearing his point-laced cravat from the dust.

"And so you, ma'am, are aware of the real name of this young man?" said Mr. Jukes, turning to the widow.

"Perfectly aware of it," she replied, significantly.

"And so am I," added Rathbone, coughing drily. "We're all aware of it—all."

"Then I've nothing further to say," returned Mr. Jukes. "Whatever construction may be put upon my visit, Crackenthorpe, I only came here to serve you."

"No doubt, my good man, no doubt," replied Rathbone. "But don't imagine you've deceived me."

"So that I've convinced the lady, I'm perfectly satisfied," said Mr. Jukes, taking his leave.

"Very well contrived, Mr. Willars—exceedingly well, sir," said Rathbone; "but it wont do. I saw at once he was one of your people."

"You are a man of great discernment, truly," replied Mr. Cripps. "Pray take a pinch of snush before you go."

"I'm afraid you spend your wages in snush, sir," laughed Rathbone. And plunging his fingers into the box, he quitted the room, chuckling to himself.

"Capitally done, 'pon rep!" cried Mr. Cripps. "The old fellow couldn't have played his part better."

"And was he really engaged to do it?" said Mrs. Nettleship. "Well, I declare he quite took me in. But you see Mr. Rathbone is too good a judge to be imposed upon. He knows the true gentleman when he sees him."

"All is going exactly as I could wish it, my angel," replied Mr. Cripps. "Before a month has passed, I'll make him give up the contract."

"Heigho!" exclaimed the widow, "I wish the month was over."

Mr. Cripps had thus completely accomplished his purpose. His rival had made up his mind that he was Mr. Villiers; and he was one of those obstinate persons who always persist in an error, even against the evidence of their senses. The valet took care to humour the idea. While persisting in giving his real name, and representing himself in his true character, Mr. Cripps demeaned himself in such sort as to leave no doubt in the mind of the sagacious tallow-chandler that his actual rank and position were widely different. Nothing, however, surprised the valet more than the kindly manner in which his rival behaved to him. So far was this carried, that he began to suspect some treachery might be intended against himself, and resolved to be on his guard.

But whatever secret opinions the rivals might entertain of each other, ostensibly they were excellent friends, and constantly went to places of amusement together. When the masquerade at Ranelagh was announced, Mrs. Nettleship instantly signified her intention of attending it, and Mr. Cripps, emboldened by his former good luck, unhesitatingly undertook to escort her. Mr. Rathbone, of course, was included in the party, and he not only begged to be permitted to pay for the tickets, but to give them a supper on the occasion. With apparent reluctance, Mr. Cripps assented to the proposal; and they then arranged the characters they should represent. The valet, being an excellent dancer, thought he should appear to advantage as harlequin; and as Mrs. Nettleship, notwithstanding her bulk, still boasted considerable agility, she readily undertook to play columbine. The part of the hump-backed lover was offered to Mr. Rathbone, and accepted by him.

There were yet two other persons whom the irresistible masquerade threatened to draw into its vortex. These were the fair Thomasine and Peter Pokerich. For more than two years the mercer's daughter had been dying to see a masquerade; and the moment she heard of the grand entertainment in question, she attacked her father on the subject, and never allowed him to rest till he promised to let her go. Peter Pokerich required no solicitation to induce him to accompany her, being as eager as herself for the spectacle. Mr. Cripps had imparted to him his design, and it was arranged that they should all go together. Only one difficulty existed,—namely, that the fair Thomasine had selected the same character as the widow. But this objection was got over by Mr. Cripps, who declared he could do very well with two columbines. The little barber himself would have preferred playing harlequin, but as Mr. Cripps had appropriated the part, he was obliged to be content with that of clown.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MASQUERADE AT RANELAGH, WITH THE VARIOUS INCIDENTS THAT OCCURRED AT IT.

At length the day so much wished for by the principal personages in this history, and by many hundreds besides, arrived. It was the second Thursday in July, and a more joyous and auspicious day never ushered in a festival. This was the more fortunate, because the early part of the entertainment was to take place out of doors. The fête commenced at two o'clock; but long before that hour, the road to Chelsea was crowded with coaches, chariots, chairs, and vehicles of every description. The river, too, was thronged with boats, freighted with masquers, and presented a most lively appearance from the multitudes of spectators drawn forth by the fineness of the day, and the gaiety of the scene, which vied in splendour with a Venetian carnival.

Having decided upon going by water, Mr. Cripps and his party left Billiter-square about one o'clock, and embarked in a tilt-boat, rowed by a couple of watermen, at Old Swan Stairs, near London Bridge. They were all, of course, in their masquerade attire, Mr. Cripps being arrayed in the parti-coloured garb of the hero of pantomime,—which differed only in some immaterial points, such as the looseness of the pantaloons at the ankle, and the amplitude of the shirt collar, from the garb of the modern harlequin. He was provided with a wand, and his face was concealed by a close black vizard. Mr. Rathbone had a large hump on his shoulders, like that of Punch (whom, by-the-by, his figure greatly resembled), a well-stuffed paunch, a large protuberance behind, shoes with immense roses in them, a tall sugar-loaf hat, and a mask, with a great hooked nose and chin. He carried, moreover, a stout knobbed stick. As to the lady, her goodly person was invested in a white satin habit, glistening with spangles, and flounced with garlands of flowers. She had short sleeves, with deep falls of lace to them,—satin shoes, braided with silver cord,—a pearl necklace round her throat, and a wreath of artificial roses upon her head. She declined hiding her features behind a mask, which Mr. Cripps declared was excessively kind and considerate.

Their passage along the river was delightful, Mr. Cripps being so excited that he could not be content to remain under the tilt, but displayed himself in the fore part of the boat, ogling all the prettiest damsels among the spectators, retorting the jests of their male companions, and, whenever an opportunity offered, dealing them a hearty thwack with his wand. Mrs. Nettleship did not altogether relish these proceedings, but Mr. Rathbone enjoyed them amazingly, and laid about him right and left, like his rival, with his knobbed stick.

On landing at Chelsea, they met, according to appointment, the little barber and his companion. The fair Thomasine looked uncommonly pretty. She had on a gown of yellow and silver, spangled like the widow's, and adorned with garlands of flowers, with a bodice of pink satin, crossed with ribands of the same colour. Round her throat she wore a chain of gold, from which depended an imitation diamond solitaire, and her rich auburn tresses were covered with the prettiest little coquettish hat imaginable. Her dress was purposely made short, so as to display her small feet and ankles. From the same motive also as the widow, she declined wearing a mask. Mr. Cripps was quite captivated by her, and claiming the privilege of his character, took her from the barber, and offered her his unoccupied arm.

Peter Pokerich wore a scull cap, covered with red and white worsted, arranged somewhat like a cock's-comb, a large ruff, a red calico doublet, white slashed calico drawers, with huge bunches of ribands at the knees, and pink silk hose. His face was painted in red and white streaks. Like the others, he was in tip-top spirits; and the whole party proceeded to Ranelagh, which was not far distant, laughing and jesting with each other merrily.

They found the road from town completely stopped up by a line of carriages, while the throng of spectators on foot rendered it difficult to get on. The familiarities of the crowd were almost unsupportable. Not a coach or a chair was suffered to pass without its occupant being inspected by the curious, who, in many cases, compelled those they annoyed to let down the windows, that they might have a better view of their dresses.

By dint of elbowing and squeezing, assisted by the wand and knobbed stick, the party contrived to move slowly forward; and as they did so, they had ample opportunity of glancing at the occupants of the different vehicles. Mr. Cripps very soon distinguished his master's gilt chariot; but he did not turn aside, as his mask and dress ensured him from detection. Mrs. Nettleship was struck by the magnificence of the equipage, and recalling the features of the beau, who was wrapped in a sky-blue domino, and wore a Spanish hat and feathers, but kept his mask in his hand, said, "Why, that's the fine gentleman who spoke to you in Marylebone Gardens. What's his name?"

"Odd enough! the same as my own—Villiers," replied Mr. Cripps. "He's a first cousin of mine, and we're considered very much alike."

By the side of Mr. Villiers sat Sir Singleton Spinke. The antiquated beau was so metamorphosed, that Mr. Cripps scarcely recognised him; nor would he, perhaps, have done so, if the charms of the fair Thomasine had not attracted the old coxcomb's attention, and caused him to thrust his head out of the window to look at her. Sir Singleton, as favouring his turn for gallantry, had chosen the part of Pierrot, and was habited in the peculiar vestment of white calico, with long, loose sleeves, as well as the broad-leaved, high-crowned hat proper to the character.

Lady Brabazon's carriage immediately preceded that of the beau, and contained her ladyship, Clementina, Trussell, and Randulph. Trussell was dressed like a Turk, and wore a large turban, ornamented with a crescent, and a fine, flowing, coal-black beard. Randulph did not appear in character, but was attired in a light blue velvet coat, laced with gold, the work of the French tailor, Desmartins, which displayed his elegant figure to the greatest advantage. He had not yet put on his mask. Clementina was robed in a pink silk domino, and wore a black velvet hat, looped with diamonds, and ornamented with a plume of white feathers, and really looked very beautiful. Lady Brabazon wore a rich silk dress, embossed with gold and silver, that suited her admirably.

Next in advance of Lady Brabazon's carriage was that of Sir Bulkeley Price. The Welsh Baronet was in his ordinary attire, but he was accompanied by a Chinese Mandarin, in a loose gown of light silk, girt at the middle with a silken belt, and having a conical cap, topped by a gilded ball, on his head. This person, notwithstanding the disguise of a long twisted beard, Mr. Cripps knew to be Cordwell Firebras.

Passing several other carriages filled with various characters, they came to an old-fashioned chariot, driven by a coachman as ancient as itself in a faded livery, and drawn by two meagre-looking, superannuated horses. But, notwithstanding its unpromising appearance, the occupants of this carriage attracted especial attention from the beholders, and many and loud were the exclamations of admiration uttered by them.

"She is beautiful!" cried one. "Enchanting!" cried another. "By far the prettiest person who has gone to the masquerade," cried a third. And so on in the same rapturous strain.

Excited by these remarks, Mr. Cripps pressed forward to have a peep into the carriage, and found it occupied by Sir Norfolk Salusbury and an exquisitely beautiful young female attired with great simplicity in a dress of white satin, with wide short sleeves, as was then the mode, trimmed with deep falls of lace. A diamond necklace encircled her throat, and a few natural flowers constituted the sole ornaments of her dark abundant hair. It was Hilda Scarve, as Mr. Cripps was instantly aware, though he had scarcely time to look at her, for Sir Norfolk, out of all patience with the familiarity of the spectators, thrust him forcibly back, and ordered the coachman, in a peremptory tone, to drive on—an injunction with which the old domestic found some difficulty in complying.

And now before entering Ranelagh, it may be proper to offer a word as to its history. Alas! for the changes and caprices of fashion! This charming place of entertainment, the delight of our grandfathers and grandmothers, the boast of the metropolis, the envy of foreigners, the renowned in song and story, the paradise of hoops and wigs, is vanished,—numbered with the things that were!—and, we fear, there is little hope of its revival. Ranelagh, it is well known, derived its designation from a nobleman of the same name, by whom the house was erected, and the gardens, esteemed the most beautiful in the kingdom, originally laid out. Its situation adjoined the Royal Hospital at Chelsea; and the date of its erection was 1690-1. Ranelagh House, on the death of the earl, in 1712, passed into the possession of his daughter, Lady Catherine Jones; but was let, about twenty years afterwards, to two eminent builders, who relet it to Lacy, afterwards patentee of Drury Lane Theatre, and commonly called Gentleman Lacy, by whom it was taken with the intention of giving concerts and breakfasts within it, on a scale far superior, in point of splendour and attraction, to any that had been hitherto attempted. In 1741, the premises were sold by Lacy to Messrs. Crispe and Meyonnet for 4000*l.*, and the rotunda was erected in the same year by subscription. From this date, the true history of Ranelagh may be said to commence.

It at once burst into fashion, and its entertainments being attended by persons of the first quality, crowds flocked in their train. Shortly after its opening, Mr. Crispe became the sole lessee; and in spite of the brilliant success of the enterprise shared the fate of most lessees of places of public amusement, being declared bankrupt in 1744. The property was then divided into thirty shares, and so continued until Ranelagh was closed. The earliest entertainments of Ranelagh were morning concerts, consisting chiefly of oratorios, produced under the direction of Michael Festing, the leader of the band; but evening concerts were speedily introduced, the latter, it may be mentioned, to show the difference of former fashionable hours from the present, commencing at half-past five, and concluding at nine. Thus it began, but towards its close, the gayest visitors to Ranelagh went at midnight, just as the concerts were finishing, and remained there till three or four in the morning. In 1754, the fashionable world were drawn to Ranelagh by a series of amusements called Comus's Court; and, notwithstanding their somewhat questionable title, the revels were conducted with great propriety and decorum. A procession which was introduced was managed with great effect, and several mock Italian duets were sung with remarkable spirit. Almost to its close, Ranelagh retained its character of being the finest place of public entertainment in Europe, and to the last the rotunda was the wonder and delight of every beholder. The coup-d'œil of the interior of this structure was extraordinarily striking, and impressed all who beheld it for the first time with surprise. It was circular in form, and exactly one hundred and fifty feet in diameter. Round the lower part of the building ran a beautiful arcade, the intervals between each arch being filled up by alcoves. Over this was a gallery with a balustrade, having entrances from the exterior, and forming a sort of upper boxes. Above the gallery was a range of round-headed windows, between each of which was a carved figure supporting the roof, and forming the terminus of the column beneath. At first, the orchestra was placed in the centre of the amphitheatre, but being found exceedingly inconvenient, as well as destructive of the symmetry of the building in that situation, it was removed to the side. It contained a stage capable of accommodating thirty or forty chorus-singers. The original site of the orchestra was occupied by a large chimney, having four faces enclosed in a beautifully-proportioned hollow, hexagonal column, with arched openings at the sides, and a balustrade at the base. Richly moulded, and otherwise ornamented with appropriate designs, this enormous column had a charming effect, and gave a peculiar character to the whole amphitheatre. A double range of large chandeliers descended from the ceiling; others were placed within the column above mentioned, and every alcove had its lamp. When all these chandeliers and lamps were lighted, the effect was wonderfully brilliant. The external diameter of the rotunda was one hundred and eighty-five feet. It was surrounded on the outside by an arcade similar to that within, above which ran a gallery, with a roof supported by pillars, and defended by a balustrade. The main entrance was a handsome piece of architecture, with a wide, round arched gate in the centre, and a lesser entrance at either side. On the left of the rotunda stood the Earl of Ranelagh's old mansion, a structure of some magnitude, but with little pretensions to beauty, being built in the formal Dutch taste of the time of William of Orange On the right, opposite the mansion, was a magnificent conservatory, with great pots of aloes in front. In a line with the conservatory, and the side entrance of the rotunda, stretched out a long and beautiful canal, in the midst of which stood a Chinese fishing-temple, approached by a bridge. On either side of the canal were broad gravel walks, and alleys shaded by lines of trees, and separated by trimly-clipped hedges. The gardens were exquisitely arranged with groves, bowers, statues, temples, wildernesses, and shady retreats.

Though Lady Brabazon's carriage was within a hundred yards of the entrance of Ranelagh when Mr. Cripps and his party passed it, owing to the crowd and confusion it was nearly a quarter of an hour in setting down. Before getting out, the whole party put on their masks: and Lady Brabazon wrapped herself in a yellow silk domino. Trussell took charge of Clementina, and her ladyship fell to Randulph's care. It was yet extremely early, but the crowd was prodigious,—many hundred persons being assembled in the area before the entrance to the rotunda. At least a thousand others were dispersed within the gardens, for the rotunda was not opened till the evening; and it was afterwards computed that more than four thousand persons attended the masquerade.

At the entrance, Lady Brabazon and her daughter were joined by Beau Villiers, Sir Bulkeley Price, and Firebras, Sir Singleton Spinke having disappeared. Randulph had already been more than once at Ranelagh, but it was only to attend the ordinary concerts, and never having seen a masquerade, he was extraordinarily struck with the spectacle presented to him. Most of the characters were grotesquely dressed, as was the taste of the time, for it was not a period when the niceties of costume were understood or regarded; still, the general effect was admirable. A May-pole, surmounted by a crown, with long ribands dangling from it, was planted in front of the conservatory, and several dancers were chasing each other round it, while lively strains were played by a band of musicians beside them. Other and less melodious sounds were heard. Now a drummer would go by, beating a rub a-dub enough to deafen every listener. Then came the vile scrapin gof a fiddle, or the shrill notes of a fife. The shouts, the laughter, the cries of all kinds baffled description, and equally vain would it be to attempt any delineation of the motley assemblage. It consisted of persons of all countries, all periods, and all ranks, for the most part oddly enough jumbled together. A pope in his tiara would be conversing with a Jew; a grave lawyer in his gown and wig had a milk-girl under his arm; a highland chief in his full equipments escorted a nun; a doge in his splendid habiliments was jesting with a common sailor with a thick stick under his arm. But frolic and fun everywhere prevailed: and to judge from the noise, everybody seemed to be merry. No one could escape from the tricks and jests of the buffoons with whom the crowd abounded. The humour o. the last century was eminently practical; cuffs and kicks were liberally dealt around, and returned in kind: and whenever a sounding blow was heard, it elicited shouts of laughter like those that are heard at the feigned knocks in a pantomime. The clowns, Punches, Pierrots, doctors, and harlequins, of whom there were several, besides our friend Mr. Cripps, were the chief creators in this kind of merriment.

While Randulph, greatly diverted by all he saw, was gazing around, a few words pronounced by a voice whose tones thrilled to his heart caught his ear. He turned, and saw close behind him, attended by a tall personage, whose stiffness left no doubt as to its being Sir Norfolk Salusbury, a beautiful female mask, whose snowy skin, and dark streaming ringlets, would have told him, if his heart had not informed him of the fact, that it was Hilda, but before he could summon resolution to address her, she had passed by; and Lady Brabazon, who had likewise heard the voice and recognised the speaker, dragged him in the opposite direction towards the May-pole. He looked eagerly backwards, but the fair mask was lost amid the throng, nor could he even discern the tall figure of Sir Norfolk.

A merry scene was before him, but he heeded it not. The chief dancers round the May-pole were Mr. Cripps and his party. To these were added, Sir Singleton Spinke, who had attached himself to the fair Thomasine, to the no small annoyance of Peter Pokerich, and a fat quack doctor and his attendant, the latter having a fool's-cap on his head. Round and round went the dancers, Mr. Cripps footing it with remarkable agility, and Peter vainly emulating his capers, when some confusion was created by Sir Singleton attempting to overtake the fair Thomasine, and possess himself of her hand. No more perfect pantaloon can be imagined than the old beau represented, and his gesticulations and grimaces called forth the laughter of all the spectators, which broke into shouts as, at the conclusion of the dance, Mr. Cripps gave him a sounding smack on his lean shanks, with his wand, while the jealous barber lent him a box over the ear. But this did not quench his ardour, and a gesture from the coquettish columbine, who seemed determined not to lose him, drew him after her, as she tripped along the right-hand alley near the canal with the rest of her gamesome party.

Randulph would willingly have disengaged himself from Lady Brabazon, but he could not do so without positive rudeness; and what made it worse was, that he was now left alone with her, for the rest of the party had disappeared, and he could not help fearing Beau Villiers might have discovered Hilda, and have gone in pursuit of her.

"Come, Randulph," said her ladyship, rallying him; "you seem to have lost your spirits at the very time they ought to be at the highest. Refreshments are given in the Chinese fishing temple. Let us go there, and try whether a glass of champagne will enliven you."

Randulph suffered himself to be led in the direction mentioned, and if he had been able to enjoy it, the scene offered to his gaze must have amused him, for it was extremely lively and diverting. The Chinese temple had been newly gilt and decorated, and its burnished pinnacles were reflected in the waters of the canal. It was filled with company, most of whom were partaking of refreshments, while an excellent band stationed in the midst of it played the liveliest airs, to which several parties on the banks of the canal were dancing. Amongst others were Mr. Cripps and his two columbines, who frolicked along the alley on the right, followed by the barber, the old beau, and Rathbone, attracting general attention. Mr. Cripps was so agile, danced so well, and leaped so wonderfully, that it was generally supposed he was Mr. Yates, the celebrated harlequin of Drury Lane, while if the fair Thomasine had not been so pretty, she would have been taken for Mrs. Mann, the favourite columbine of the same house. As it was, she was allowed on all hands to be the best dancer in the garden; and her glances were so bewitching, that many other persons fell in love with her besides Sir Singleton Spinke. One person, in especial, who displayed the most undisguised admiration of her, and who kept as near as he could, was a tall young man, with thin, sharp features, which Mr. Cripps, after puzzling his brains to recollect them, at last called to mind as belonging to the companion of Kitty Conway, at the Folly on the Thames. This young man, who wore a long black silk gown, a velvet cap of the same colour, and a flowing black wig, and intended to represent an Italian doctor, it is, perhaps, almost needless to say, was Philip Frewin. Another admirer was a person habited as a pope, who kept constantly in their train, but whose robe and large mask precluded all idea of discovering who he was. Neither Mr. Cripps nor his pretty columbine were displeased by the attention they attracted, and the latter returned the amorous glances cast at her by Philip, and the passionate gestures of the pope, in a manner that drove the little barber almost distracted. As to Mr. Cripps, he threw somersets over the clipped hedge, vaulted over Mr. Rathbone's hump, slapped the pope on the back, clapped the old beau on the shoulder, twirled round his head, and performed a hundred other pantomime antics, to the infinite diversion of the beholders. When arrived near the extremity of the walk, he called out to the musicians in the Chinese temple to strike up the tune, "Hey, boys, up we go!" and immediately commenced a lively dance to it with his two columbines, in which they were presently joined by Rathbone, Sir Singleton, and the barber.

Having crossed the bridge leading to the Chinese temple, Lady Brabazon stopped, and setting Randulph at liberty, leaned against the rail at the entrance, to survey the gay crowd around. Whilst she was thus engaged, Beau Villiers, followed by an attendant with a bottle of champagne on a silver waiter, approached her, and pressing her to take a glass, looked significantly at her, as if he had something to communicate.

Taking advantage of this fortunate interruption, Randulph sprang into a Chinese-fashioned boat lying near the bridge, and seizing the oars rowed off towards the canal, keeping near its sides, the better to view the company. Failing, however, in discovering the object of his search, he was returning towards the bridge, where Lady Brabazon was still standing in conversation with the beau, when a roar of laughter from the dancers in the alley on the further side of the clipped hedge, attracted his attention. This, it appeared, was occasioned by a misadventure that had just occurred to the old beau, who having been carried away by his enthusiasm at the fair Thomasine's dancing, had rushed forward with the intention of snatching a kiss from her ruby lips, when the jealous little barber, divining his intention, threw himself in his way, and tripped up his heels. In this posture he presented a tempting mark for Mr. Cripps, whose wand resounded in a rapid succession of strokes upon his withered limbs.

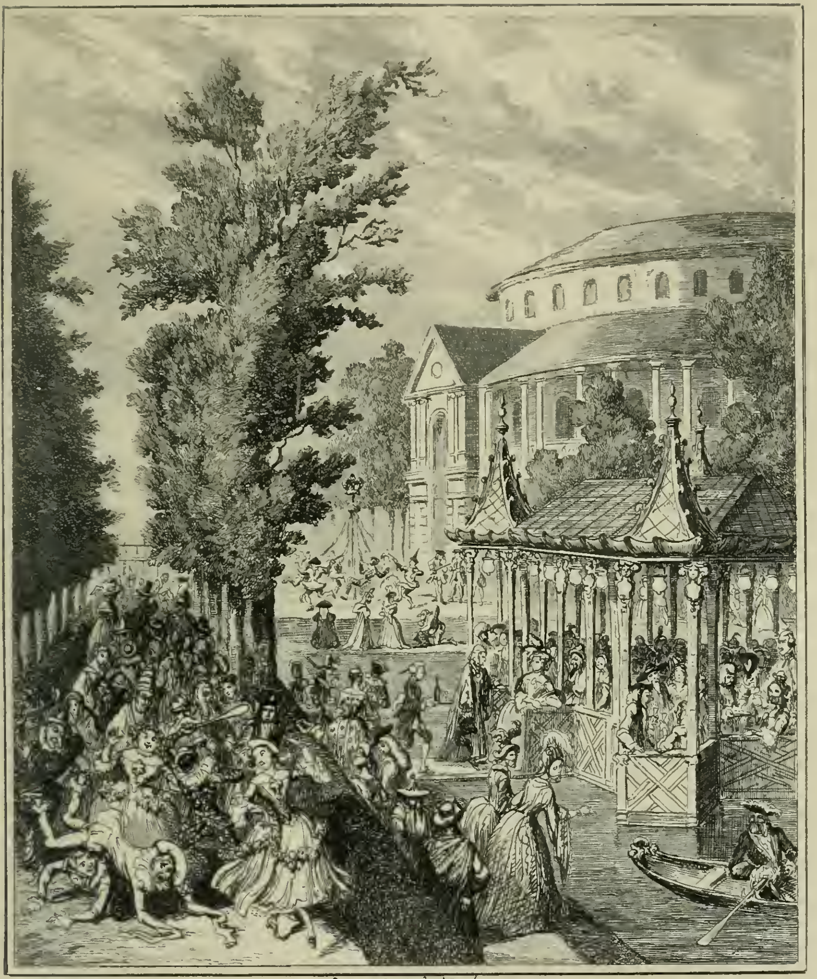
Randulph, who had raised himself in the boat to see what was going forward, now sat down, and had just resumed the oars, when Clementina Brabazon, and another masked dame who had been conversing with Trussell and Firebras, approached the edge of the canal, and called to him.

"I know who you are searching for, Mr. Crew," cried Clementina; "and could help you to find the person if I chose."

"Then you will choose, I am sure," replied Randulph, pulling hastily towards her. "Where is she?"

"Well, I'll be good-natured," she answered. "Look behind you."

Randulph instantly turned in the direction indicated, and beheld Hilda seated at one end of the temple. Behind her stood Sir


George Cruikshank fec

The Masquerade in Ranelagh gardens

Norfolk Salusbury, while Sir Bulkeley Price was handing her a glass of champagne. But Hilda was so much occupied by what was passing on the canal, that she was not aware of the knight's attention. As Randulph regarded her, however, she arose, and declining Sir Bulkeley's offer, took Sir Norfolk's arm, and left the temple.

Heedless of Clementina's laughter, Randulph, without losing sight of Hilda, pushed the boat towards the bank, and leaping out, was about to follow her, when he was arrested by a heavy hand laid on his arm, and looking up, beheld Cordwell Firebras.

"You are on a vain quest, young man," said Firebras, in an under tone. "You will never obtain a word with Hilda Scarve unless by my mediation."

Randulph made a movement of impatience.

"Be not rash," pursued Firebras, still detaining him. "I tell you, you will totally fail in your object, and will only involve yourself in a quarrel with Sir Norfolk Salusbury."

"I care not," replied Randulph. "Let me go. By Heaven! I shall lose her."

"That you most assuredly will, if you follow her now," rejoined Firebras, calmly. "Be ruled by me. I will introduce you to her, but it cannot be in your own character, for Sir Norfolk has been requested by her father not to permit your approach. And I shall, therefore, have to pass you off to him as some one else."

"And you attach no condition to the obligation?" cried Randulph—"none at least that I cannot honourably comply with."

"I may, perhaps, remind you of it at some future time, that is all," rejoined Firebras.

"Enough!" cried Randulph. "Take me to her at once."

"Impossible," exclaimed Firebras. "I must prepare Sir Norfolk, and give Hilda a hint of my intention, lest she should prevent it, for I perceived just now that she discovered you. Rejoin your party, and avoid exciting the suspicions of Lady Brabazon and Beau Villiers, or they may mar all. I may not, perhaps, be able to accomplish the object you desire till the evening, so curb your impatience."

With this, he moved off, and mingled with the crowd, while Randulph joined Lady Brabazon. Her ladyship made many sarcastic remarks upon his display upon the water, and complimented him, ironically, upon his skill as a rower. Randulph was in no mood for such raillery, and might have made some angry retort, but at that moment, there was a great stir in the walk near the bridge, occasioned by the approach of the Prince and Princess of Wales, attended by a large retinue. The royal party entered the temple, and remained there more than half an hour conversing with those around them. Randulph had the honour of a presentation to the prince, by Mr. Villiers; and while engaged in conversation with that illustrious personage, he perceived Cordwell Firebras among the by-standers; but he could not, without a breach of etiquette, withdraw to speak to him, and when the royal party quitted the temple, he was gone. He was about to search for him, when Beau Villiers, who had followed the Prince of Wales, hastily returned, and said, with an expression of malicious satisfaction, that he had his Royal Highness's commands to him to join his train. Randulph had no alternative but compliance, and to his own chagrin, and his uncle Trussell's delight, he mingled with the royal attendants, and proceeded with them in their promenade through the gardens.

In the course of this ramble, he perceived Firebras standing with Hilda and Sir Norfolk; and though he was greatly annoyed not to be able to join them, it was some satisfaction to him to observe that his present position seemed to operate to his advantage with the lady. The performances of Mr. Cripps's party diverted both the royal personages during their stroll, and they laughed heartily at a comic dance executed by them.

Some hours passed on in this way, and Randulph was still held in bondage. At length, the rotunda was opened. Of course, the royal party was ceremoniously ushered in, in the first place; but immediately afterwards, crowds poured in, and the whole area of the amphitheatre, together with the boxes and gallery above, were filled with company. What with the innumerable lights, and the extraordinary variety of dresses, the whole scene had a most brilliant effect. There was an excellent band in the orchestra, and a concert was commenced, but little attention was paid to it by the assemblage, who continued promenading round and round the amphitheatre—laughing and talking loudly with each other. As soon as the concert was over, the loud blowing of a horn attracted general observation to a platform near the central column, on which the quack doctor and his attendant were stationed—the latter of whom began dispensing his medicines, and vaunting their efficacy, in a highly ludicrous manner.

This and other entertainments consumed the time till ten o'clock; before which, however, a magnificent supper was served to the royal party in a private refreshment room. A bell was then rung, to announce that a grand display of fireworks was about to take place, and the company hurried to the outer galleries and to the gardens to witness the exhibition. Much confusion ensued, and amidst it, the fair Thomasine, somehow or other, got separated from her party.

The little barber was almost frantic. He rushed hither and thither among the crowd, calling for her by name, and exciting general ridicule. At last, in an agony of despair, he stationed himself near the scaffold where the fireworks were placed; and when the first signal-rocket ascended, he perceived her pretty face turned upwards at a little distance from him. She was standing near the trees with the old beau, whose transports at his enviable situation were somewhat disturbed by the descent of a heavy rocket-stick on his head. At this juncture the little barber reached his truant mistress, and forcing her from Sir Singleton, placed her rounded arm under his own, and held it fast.

"Oh dear, how glad I am to see you," said the naughty little Thomasine, for "fair" she does not deserve to be called; "we've been looking for you everywhere"—(here she told a sad story). "That odious old beau has been trying to persuade me to run away with him. He offers to settle—I don't know what —upon me, and to make me Lady Spinke."

"And why don't you accept his offer?" said the barber, in an ecstasy of jealous rage.

"Because I'm engaged, and engagements with me are sacred things," replied the fair Thomasine, theatrically, yet tenderly. "But do look at that beautiful wheel."

The fireworks were really splendid. Flights of rockets soared into the skies; magnificent wheels performed their mutations; star-pieces poured forth their radiant glories; maroon batteries resounded; Chinese fountains filled the air with glittering showers; pots des aigrettes, pots des brins, and pots des saucissons, discharged their stars, serpents, and crackers; yew trees burnt with brilliant fire; water-rockets turned the canal to flame; fire balloons ascended; and a grand car with flaming wheels, drawn by sea-horses snorting fire, and containing a figure of Neptune, which traversed the whole length of the canal, and encircled the Chinese temple—the bridge being removed to make way for it—and finally exploded, scattering serpents and crackers in every direction, concluded the exhibition, amid the general plaudits of the assemblage.

Darkness for a few minutes enveloped the crowd, during which a few cries were heard in timid female tones; but the lamps were as soon as possible lighted, and the majority of the assemblage returned to the rotunda, where they repaired to the alcoves, and many a bowl of punch was emptied, many a bottle of champagne quaffed; after which dancing was resumed with greater spirit than ever.

Mr. Rathbone gave a capital supper to his party, in which the old beau contrived to get himself included. He contrived also to sit near the fair Thomasine, and pledged her so often and so deeply, that he fell beneath the table. Here he was left by the others, and a minuet being struck up, Mr. Cripps offered his hand to the widow, and led her forth to dance: while Mr. Rathbone, greatly exhilarated by the punch he had drunk, stood by, laughing at them ready to split his sides; and the little barber took the opportunity of their being left alone together, to reprove the fair Thomasine for her improper conduct towards the old beau during supper.

Liberated by the departure of the Prince of Wales, who quitted the gardens on the conclusion of the fireworks, Randulph immediately returned to the rotunda, in the hope of finding Hilda still there. He had scarcely entered it when he perceived Firebras at supper by himself in one of the alcoves, and instantly joined him.

"She is still here," said Firebras, "and as soon as I have finished my supper I will take you to her. There would be no use in going now, for Sir Norfolk has only just ordered supper, and I can merely introduce you as a partner for a dance. Sit down, and take a glass of champagne."

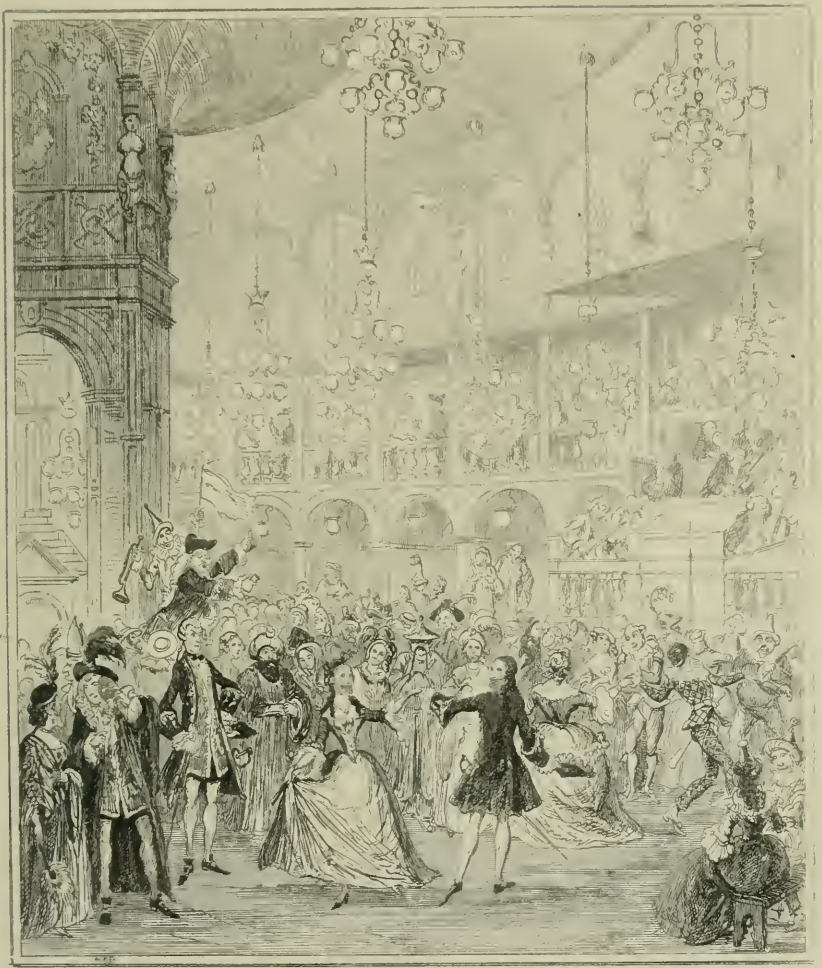
Randulph declined the latter offer, and was obliged to control his impatience until Firebras thought fit to rise. Crossing the amphitheatre, they proceeded to an alcove, in which Sir Norfolk and Hilda were seated, and Firebras, bowing to the old knight, said, "Sir Norfolk, permit me to have the honour of presenting the friend I mentioned some hours ago to your fair charge. Miss Scarve," he added, after a significant look at Hilda, "this gentleman wishes to have the honour of dancing a minuet with you. I am sorry there is no time for a more ceremonious introduction to yourself, Sir Norfolk, but the musicians are striking up the dance."

Upon this Hilda arose, and tendered her hand, with some trepidation, to Randulph, who, with a breast thrilling with joyful emotion, led her into the open space cleared for the dancers, and part of which was already occupied, as before related, by Mr. Cripps and the widow. No time was allowed Randulph to hazard a word to his partner. Scarcely were they placed when the minuet commenced. The grace with which they performed this charming, though formal dance, excited the admiration of all the beholders, and contrasted strongly with the exaggerated style in which it was executed by Mr. Cripps and Mrs. Nettleship. Indeed, a better foil—had such been desired—could not have been found than the two latter personages presented.

Sir Norfolk planted himself on one side to view the dance, and there was unwonted elation in his countenance as he witnessed the graceful movements of his fair cousin and her partner. Trussell in his Turkish dress was among the spectators; and not far from him stood Cordwell Firebras. There were two other personages, also, who watched the dance, but who regarded it with any other sentiments than those of satisfaction. These were Lady Brabazon and Beau Villiers.

"So you see, Villiers, notwithstanding all your scheming, he *has* contrived to dance with her," said the former.

"He has," replied the beau, partly removing his mask, and displaying a countenance inflamed with passion—"but he has



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not exchanged a word with her, and I will take care he shall not exchange one."

"You are desperately in love with this girl, Villiers," said Lady Brabazon, angrily. "I thought it was her fortune merely you aimed at."

"I have been foiled, and that has piqued me," replied Villiers.

"*Le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle*," rejoined Lady Brabazon. "After the failure of your attempt to carry her off, I wonder you will persevere."

"Hush!" exclaimed the beau. "Some one may overhear us. I would have carried her off to-night, if I had known she would have been here. Your ladyship ought to be obliged to me for the trouble I am taking. I shall remove your rival, and you will then have young Crew entirely to yourself. And now to put Sir Norfolk on his guard."

With this, he passed on to the Welsh baronet, and addressed him. The latter bowed stiffly in return, and approached nearer the dancers; and while Hilda was courtseying to her partner at the close of the minuet, he took her hand and led her away. The young man would have followed them, but Cordwell Firebras came up and arrested him.

"It wont do," he said; "Villiers has told the old baronet who you are. I must go after him instantly, and make some excuse for my share in the matter, or I shall have to cross swords with him to-morrow morning. I have done all I can for you. Good night."

Soon after this, Randulph quitted the masquerade with Trussell. With some difficulty a boat was procured to convey them home. Finding his nephew in no mood for conversation, Trussell, who was rather tired, and moreover had drunk a good deal of punch and champagne, disposed himself to slumber, nor did he awake till they reached Lambeth Stairs.

Another boat had just landed, and two persons in dominos marched before them in the very direction they were going.

"Why, who the deuce have we here?" cried Trussell, running forward to overtake the party in advance. "Zounds, brother, is it you? Have you been at the masquerade?"

"I have," replied Abel; "and I have seen all that has occurred there."

CHAPTER IX.

JACOB BRINGS A PIECE OF INTELLIGENCE TO RANDULPH—TRUSSELL AND RANDULPH GO TO DRURY LANE.

About a week after this, as Randulph was dressing himself one morning, Mr. Jukes entered his room, and informed him that the miser's servant, Jacob Post, wished to speak to him.

"He is at the door," added the butler, mysteriously—"he seems very anxious to see you, so I brought him up stairs."

"Quite right, Jukes," replied Randulph—"let him come in by all means."

"I don't know that it *is* quite right, sir," replied Mr. Jukes, smiling. "I fear my master may be angry with me for admitting him; but I didn't like to disoblige you."

"Very kind of you, indeed, Jukes," replied Randulph. "My uncle shall know nothing about the matter from me. But let Jacob come in."

The good-natured butler then retired, and the next moment the porter entered the room, scratching his head, as was his wont when in any way embarrassed.

"Well, Jacob," said Randulph, extending his hand to him,—"I'm glad to see you. Sit down."

"No, I thank'ee, sir," replied Jacob, "I'd rather stand. My business wont allow of sittin'."

"Then begin upon it at once," rejoined Randulph.

"Before I begin," said Jacob, making himself up for a speech, "I must premise that I'm come on my own accord, and at nobody else's request whatsomdever, least of all by desire of Miss Hilda—"

"I'm perfectly satisfied of it, Jacob," interrupted Randulph—"perfectly."

"Then you quite understand I'm come here without her knowledge or previtty?" said Jacob.

"Quite so," replied Randulph—"I am quite sure she did not send you."

"No, that she didn't," rejoined Jacob, "and mortal angry she'd be with me if she thought I had come. But I see you're impatient, and I'll keep you no longer in suspense. I'm come, then, to tell you, that my young missis is going to Wauxhall to-night."

"A thousand thanks for the information, Jacob!" cried Randulph, taking a crown from his purse which lay on the table—"Drink my health."

"I'd rather not take the money,—much obleeged to you all the same, sir," replied Jacob. "But as I was sayin', my young missis is goin' to Wauxhall with Sir Norfolk Salusbury, and they're to join Lady Drabbyson and Mr. Willars. Now I've no great opinion of those two fine folks. Indeed, I suspect they're contriving some wicked design against Miss Hilda. But it's no use warnin' my master, for he wilfully shuts his eyes to danger; and as to Sir Norfolk, he's too much wrapped up in hisself, and too proud to listen to me. I therefore thought it better to come to you."

"What do you suspect, Jacob?" asked Randulph.

"Why, it's no matter what I suspect just now," replied the porter,—"but I'm on a scent, and I'll find it out before night. Have you heard o' the attempt to carry off young missis?"

"No!" replied Randulph—"but you surely don't suspect Mr. Villiers of it?"

"It mayn't be safe to speak out," replied Jacob, "especially as I can't bring proof. But I could almost undertake to swear that his walet, Mr. Cripps, was one of the parties engaged in it."

"The rascal is capable of anything!" cried Randulph. "Satisfy me that Mr. Villiers was the author of the atrocious attempt you have mentioned, and he shall pay for his villany with his life."

"Wait till to-night, sir," replied Jacob. "I may be able to satisfy you then. I'm on the look out."

"I have my own reasons for thinking some design is on foot," replied Randulph, "because Lady Brabazon has sent me and my uncle tickets for Drury Lane to-night, regretting she could not go there herself, but omitting to mention a word about Vauxhall."

"She wanted to get you out o' the way," returned Jacob. "It's a deep laid scheme. But I'll unravel it. Don't let any one—not even your uncle, Mr. Trussell, know where you're goin' to-night. You can watch what's done, and act accordingly. I'll be there, and let you know what I've learnt in the meantime."

"I entirely approve of your advice," rejoined Randulph, "and will act in accordance with it. But how will you see me there?"

"Be under the orchyster at ten o'clock, and I'll find means o' comin' to you," replied Jacob. "And now my time's up. You'll be cautious?"

"Fear me not," replied Randulph.

And Jacob took his departure.

Acting upon the porter's suggestion, Randulph said nothing to his uncles of what had passed; nor did Mr. Jukes mention a word of Jacob's visit, so that neither of them had any idea of the cause of his abstraction, though both remarked it. He spent the greater part of the morning in his own room, in order to indulge his thoughts unrestrainedly, and only came down stairs to dinner when he was perfectly composed. Abel was graver than usual, but Trussell was in his usual flow of spirits, and talked of the performances they were about to witness.

"We are going to see the Beau's Stratagem, sir," he said to his brother, "and as Mr. Garrick is to play Archer, and Mr. Macklin, Scrub, we cannot fail of being well entertained."

"Humph!" exclaimed Abel.

"Then as to ladies," added Trussell, turning to Randulph, "we are to have the charming Mrs. Cibber, and the scarcely less charming Mrs. Woffington; and the critics tell me that the new opera—the Temple of Dulness—is to be delightful."

"No wonder critics say so," observed Abel, with a sneer; "the title alone would make it attractive to them."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Trussell. "By-the-by," he added aside to Randulph, "your friend Kitty Conway sings at Vauxhall to-night."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Randulph.

"I'm surprised you don't go to hear her," said Abel, who had overheard the remark, looking so hard at him that he was covered with confusion.

"He's otherwise engaged," interrupted Trussell. "I only heard of it this morning by accident. We'll go to Vauxhall if you prefer it to Drury Lane, Randulph."

"No, don't alter your arrangements!" cried Randulph, hastily.

"Sir Singleton Spinke will be there, I'll be sworn," laughed Trussell—"though he's got a new flame; the daughter of a mercer named Deacle, who lives in the Little Sanctuary, just opposite—but never mind where she lives," he added, observing his brother frowned—"she's a devilish pretty girl, and is called, on account of her beauty, the fair Thomasine. You saw her at the masquerade at Ranelagh the other night. She was one of the columbines who danced with Mr. Cripps."

"*I* noticed her," observed Abel—"a silly coquette!"

"I'll tell you a capital joke about Sir Singleton and this fair damsel," pursued Trussell, laughing. "You must know that he supped with her and her party the other night at Ranelagh, and got so drunk that he was left under the table in the alcove. While he was in this state, some one, most probably Mr. Cripps, cut off his long queue, and sent it the next morning in a packet to the fair Thomasine, accompanied by a tender epistle, offering her his hand, and begging, as he could not send a lock of his hair, to enclose instead—his pigtail!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Mr. Jukes, who was in attendance. "Just like one of Crackenthorpe's tricks,—just like him."

This story forced a smile even from Abel, and the rest of the dinner passed off agreeably enough. The cloth was removed, and the wine placed upon the table, bnt Randulph scarcely tasted it, and Trussell, after swallowing a few glasses, said it was time to start for the play.

"Before you go, I have a word to say to you, Randulph," remarked Abel, in a tone that alarmed the young man. "I have made no comments upon your dissipated course of life of late, because I felt it would be thrown away; but it must now be ended."

"I am at a loss to know, sir, what particular part of my conduct has displeased you," said Randulph.

"I speak of your conduct generally, not particularly," rejoined Abel, severely. "But there will be one here to-morrow who has better title to admonish you than I have."

"Your words would seem to refer to my mother, sir," said Randulph, in great surprise. "Is she coming to town?"

"She will be here to-morrow," replied Abel. "But you are detaining your uncle Trussell—he is impatient. Go. It is your last night, make the most of it."

Trussell was as much surprised as Randulph at what had just passed, but he made no remark till they got out of the house.

"Well, I shall be delighted to see my sister Crew," he said—"delighted to see her. But I wonder why the old gentleman made a secret of her coming. Don't be apprehensive of any lectures from her, Randulph. I'll set all right, depend upon it."

"It is strange she shouldn't have written to me on the subject," said Randulph.

"Most likely my brother imposed secrecy upon her," replied Trussell. "However, we must have a little talk together before her arrival. I must counsel you how to act at this juncture. She's an excellent creature, your mother. But it'll never do to be tied to the apron-string. Let us forget the matter now, and, adopting the old gentleman's advice, make the most of to-night."

A boat conveyed them to Somerset Stairs, where they landed, and proceeded to Drury Lane Theatre. Randulph had resolved upon what course to pursue. The play was admirably performed; but even the inimitable acting of Garrick and Macklin failed to interest him, so much was he preoccupied. The comedy over, they adjourned to Tom's Coffee-house in Covent Garden, where abundance of company was assembled, plentifully besprinkled with blue and green ribands and stars. Trussell met a host of acquaintances, and framing a hasty excuse, Randulph left him with them, and hurrying to Salisbury Stairs, took a boat, and ordered the waterman to row to Vauxhall.

CHAPTER X.

THE SUPPER AT VAUXHALL—BEAU VILLIERS' ATTEMPT TO CARRY OFF HILDA DEFEATED BY RANDULPH.

CELEBRATED throughout Europe, and once esteemed the most delightful place of recreation of the kind, Vauxhall Gardens have been in existence more than a century; and it rejoices us to find that they are not altogether closed. They were first opened with a ridotto al fresco, about the year 1730, and speedily rising to a high reputation, were enlarged, and laid out in the most superb manner. A magnificent orchestra, of Gothic form, ornamented with carving and niches, and provided with a fine organ, was erected in the midst of the garden. There was likewise a rotunda, though not of equal dimensions with that of

Ranelagh, being only seventy feet in diameter, with a dome-like roof, supported by four handsome Ionic columns, embellished with foliage at the base, while the shafts were wreathed with a Gothic balustrade, representing climbing figures. From the centre depended a magnificent chandelier. A part of the rotunda, used as a saloon, was decorated with columns, between which were paintings by Hayman. The entrance from the gardens was through a Gothic portal. Moreover, there were pavilions or alcoves, ornamented with paintings, from designs by Hogarth and Hayman, appropriate to the place; each alcove having a table in it capable of accommodating six or eight persons, and leading in an extensive sweep to a magnificent piazza, five hundred feet in length, of Chinese architecture. This semicircle led to a further sweep of pavilions. A noble gravel walk, nine hundred feet in length, bordered with lofty trees, and terminated by a broad lawn, in which there was a Gothic obelisk, faced the entrance. But the enchantment of the gardens commenced with the moment of their illumination, when upwards of two thousand lamps, lighted almost simultaneously, glimmered through the green leaves of the trees, and shed their radiance on the fairy scene around. This was the grand charm of Vauxhall. One of its minor attractions was a curious piece of machinery representing a miller's house, a water-wheel, and a cascade, which, at that period of the art, was thought quite marvellous. There were numberless walks and wildernesses in the grounds, and most of the vistas were adorned with statues. In one of them, at a date a little posterior to this history, was a statue of Handel as Orpheus holding a lyre.

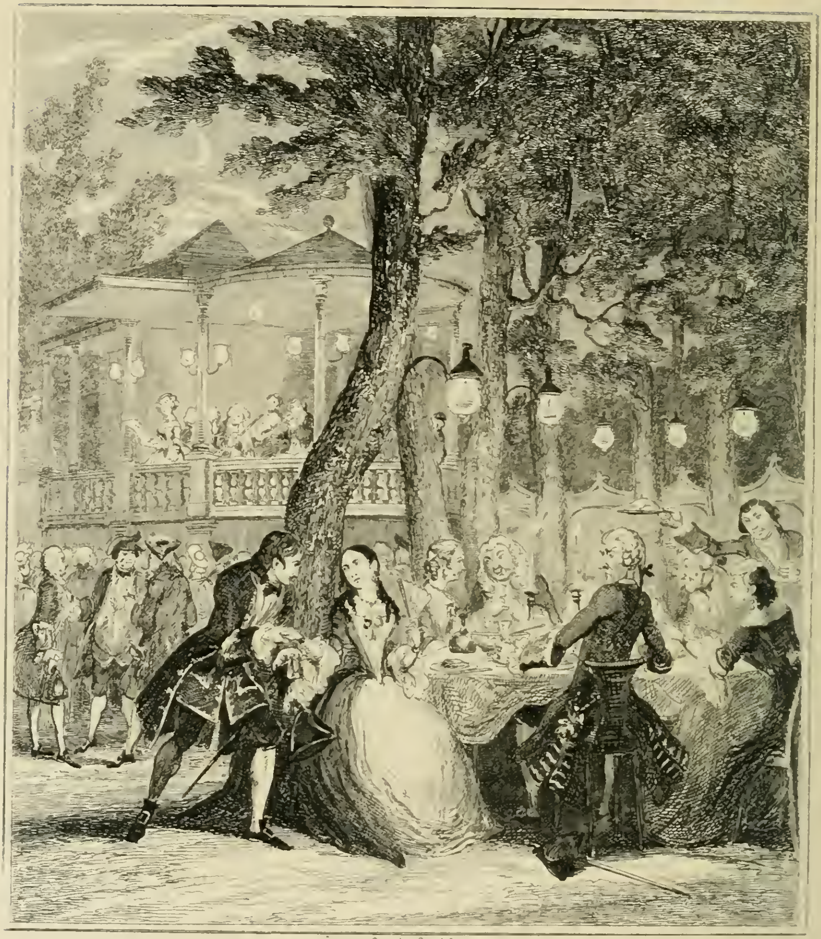
It was nearly ten o'clock when Randulph reached the gardens. He proceeded along the grand walk, which was brilliantly illuminated, and filled with company, as far as the obelisk, but he could see nothing of Sir Norfolk or Hilda. He then turned into one of the side walks, and approached the orchestra, in front of which stood Kitty Conway, preparing to sing. She instantly detected him, and made a slight movement of recognition. As he passed the range of alcoves beneath the orchestra, he perceived Jacob, who instantly came towards him.

"I've found it all out," said the porter—"I knew I should. Mr. Willars *is* the contriver of the plot. He means to carry off Miss Hilda, and has engaged a coach for that purpose, which is stationed at the back o' the gardens. Luckily, the coachman is a friend o' mine, and it's through him I've detected the scheme."

"But where is your mistress?" cried Randulph.

"There," replied Jacob, pointing to a party seated at supper beneath the grove of trees in front of the orchestra.

"I see," replied Randulph. "By Heaven!" he cried, "Mr. Villiers is coming this way. Two persons stop him. As I live, one of them is his valet, and the other Captain Culpepper, a


George Cruikshank

The Supper at Vauxhall

fellow whom my uncle Trussell told me was a sort of bravo, and would cut any man's throat for hire. Doubtless, they are planning the abduction."

"You may take your oath of it," replied Jacob. "I'll manage to get near 'em unobserved. Come back to this place when they separate, and you shall know all."

So saying, he slouched his hat over his eyes, and mingling with the crowd, got within ear-shot of the beau, who, as has been intimated, was addressing Captain Culpepper and Mr. Cripps.

Randulph, meanwhile, felt irresistibly drawn towards the table where Hilda was seated, and as he kept behind the trees, he was not noticed by the party, though he *was* noticed by Kitty Conway, from the orchestra, who, guessing his intention, was so much agitated, that, for the first time in her professional career, she made some false notes in her singing. Hilda's seat was placed against a tree. On her right was Sir Norfolk Salusbury; and on the right of the baronet, Lady Brabazon; next her ladyship was a vacant chair—no doubt just quitted by Beau Villiers; then came Lady Fazakerly; then Sir Bulkeley Price; and, lastly, Clementina Brabazon, who occupied the seat on the left of the miser's daughter. Partly screened by the tree against which Hilda was seated, Randulph bent forward, and breathed her name in the gentlest accents. Hilda heard the whisper, and looking round, beheld the speaker.

How much may be conveyed in a glance! She read the intensity of his passion, and the depth of his devotion in his eyes; and for the first time, returned his gaze with a look of kindness, almost of tenderness; Randulph was transported; he could not resist the impulse that prompted him to advance and take her hand, which she unresistingly yielded to him.

All this was the work of a minute; but the action had not been unobserved, either by Kitty Conway or Lady Brabazon. Both had felt a similar pang of jealousy, but revenge instantly occurred to the latter. While Randulph was in the act of raising Hilda's hand to his lips, she touched Sir Norfolk's arm, and pointing in the direction of the lovers, whispered, "Look there!"

Sir Norfolk arose, and in a stern and peremptory voice, said to the young man, "Set free that lady's hand, sir!"

"Not unless she chooses to withdraw it," replied Randulph.

"I am wholly to blame for this, Sir Norfolk," said Hilda, withdrawing her hand, and blushing deeply.

"You are pleased to say so, Miss Scarve," returned Sir Norfolk; "but the young man has been guilty of a great indecorum, and I shall call him to a strict account for it."

"I shall be ready to answer the call, whenever you please, Sir Norfolk," rejoined Randulph. "But this is not the place for menaces. You will do well to look after your charge."

"I shall take care to keep off impertinents like you," replied Sir Norfolk.

"Better guard her against other dangers which require more penetration than you care to practise," retorted Randulph.

"I have only one answer to make to such insolence," said Sir Norfolk, "and that shall be given to-morrow. You shall hear from me, Mr. Crew."

"As soon as you please, Sir Norfolk," replied Randulph.

"For my sake, Mr. Crew," interposed Hilda, "let this quarrel go no further. I have been the innocent cause of it. Promise me it shall not."

"I would willingly obey you in anything, Miss Scarve," replied Randulph; "but in this case it is not in my power. Farewell!'

Fixing one passionate look upon her, he then bowed haughtily to Sir Norfolk, who returned his salutation in kind, and withdrew.

As he walked away, he encountered Beau Villiers, who was returning from his conference. Villiers started on seeing him, but instantly recovered himself, and would have addressed him, but Randulph turned abruptly away.

"What the devil has brought Randulph Crew here?" said Villiers to Sir Singleton, as he joined the party. "I thought he was at Drury Lane."

"Devil knows!" cried the old beau. "But he has made a pretty scene."

And he proceeded to relate what had occurred. Villiers laughed heartily at the recital.

"I hope old Salusbury will cut his throat," he said, in an under tone.

"Why, it would be desirable to get him out of the way, certainly," replied the old beau. "The women are all mad about him."

"Especially Kitty Conway," observed Villiers. "Odds life! this accounts for her having fainted in the orchestra. I wondered what could be the matter with her, but now I understand it. All is prepared," he added, in a deep whisper to Lady Brabazon.

"Be careful how you act," she replied, in a low tone. "You'll find Sir Norfolk dangerous, and Randulph Crew is on the watch."

"Fear nothing," he rejoined, "I've taken my measures securely. Make towards the dark walk, and contrive to lead him and the others away."

Lady Brabazon nodded.

Soon after this she arose, and, without ceremony, took Sir Norfolk's arm, while Villiers very gallantly offered his to Hilda. The rest of the party paired off in like manner.

Leading the way in the direction agreed upon, Lady Brabazon expressed a desire to view the scenic representation of the mill and water-fall before mentioned, which was exhibited in a hollow of the great walk; and they proceeded towards it. Hilda was much displeased by the assiduities of her companion, and she could not help remarking that he contrived, on various pretences, to linger behind the rest of the party, and though she repeatedly urged him to rejoin them, he always made some excuse for not doing so. At last, on pausing longer than usual, they quite lost sight of them, and were hurrying forward at Hilda's urgent request, when, as they passed one of the side vistas, Mr. Cripps, who was standing at the end of it, advanced towards his master.

"Fortunately encountered, sir," said the valet, bowing; "Lady Brabazon sent me to look for you, to tell you that she and the party are gone down a walk on the left, to see a fine painting in the Chinese pavilion at the end of it. With your permission, I'll show you the way."

"Oh, yes, let us go to them by all means," said Hilda, unsuspectingly.

"Lead on, then!" cried the beau, scarcely able to conceal his satisfaction at the success of the scheme.

A few steps brought them to the end of a narrow walk, arched over by trees, the branches of which were so thickly interlaced, that the moonlight could not penetrate through them. Alarmed by its appearance, Hilda drew back.

"How thoughtless of Sir Norfolk to leave me thus!" she exclaimed.

"Why, you are surely not afraid of accompanying me down this walk, Miss Scarve," laughed the beau. "My valet is with us, and shall protect you. The Chinese pavilion is not more than a hundred yards off; and the walk, though dark, is not solitary."

Fancying she perceived some persons within it, Hilda suffered herself to be led on; but she had not advanced many steps when all her uneasiness returned, and she bitterly regretted having assented. But it was too late. The beau's grasp had tightened upon her arm, and he drew her quickly forward, while Mr. Cripps proceeded at the same rapid pace. Once or twice, she thought she heard footsteps behind her, and almost fancied she could distinguish a figure walking near them, but she did not dare to express her terrors. They had proceeded, so far as she could judge, about a hundred yards, when a sudden turn in the walk disclosed a low hedge; beyond was the open country, bathed in moonlight.

Coming to a sudden halt, the beau said in a hurried, but imperative tone—"Miss Scarve, I love you to desperation, and am determined to make you mine. You are now in my power, and must accompany me."

"Never!" replied Hilda, resolutely. "And I command you to release me."

She would have screamed for help, if Villiers, who grasped her more tightly, had not taken out his handkerchief, and, placing it over her mouth, prevented her cries. While this was passing, Captain Culpepper emerged from the trees, and hastened with Mr. Cripps towards him.

"Bravo, sir," cried the Captain. "All goes well this time. We'll have her in the coach in a twinkling."

"Not so fast, villains!" thundered Randulph, rushing forward. "I have allowed you to go thus far to see to what lengths your villany would carry you. But you shall pay dearly for it."

As he spoke, he rushed to the beau, and snatching Hilda from him, dashed him backwards with such force that he fell upon the ground. Another person likewise came to the rescue. This was Jacob, who, brandishing his cudgel, hurried to the scene of action. On seeing him, the valet whipped out his blade, but it was beaten from his grasp, and he only avoided a terrible blow from the cudgel by a nimble leap aside. Without waiting for a second blow, he plunged into the wood, and made his escape. Captain Culpepper fared no better. Before he could draw his sword, he received a blow on the head, that stretched him senseless and bleeding on the ground. Hilda, meantime, had murmured her thanks to her deliverer, who felt, as he pressed her to his bosom, that the whole of his previous anxiety was more than repaid by the unutterable joy of the moment.

"Hilda!" he cried, passionately, "I would risk a thousand lives for you. Forgive me if, at this moment, I dare to ask if I may hope?"

She murmured a faint response in the affirmative.

"I am the happiest of men!" cried Randulph, transported with delight.

"Alas!" exclaimed Hilda, "my avowal can give you little happiness. I can never be yours."

"There you speak truth!" cried Villiers, who by this time had regained his feet, and furiously approached them. "You never shall be his."

"This is the leader of the gang!" cried Jacob, who having just disposed of Captain Culpepper, now rushed towards the beau, brandishing his cudgel in a formidable manner. "I'll soon settle him."

"Leave him alone, Jacob!" cried Randulph, authoritatively; his punishment belongs to me."

"You're wrong, sir," rejoined Jacob, "but I sha'n't disobey you. He doesn't deserve to be treated like a gen'l'man."

"Oblige me by stepping aside for a moment, Mr. Crew!" said the beau, with forced politeness. And as Randulph complied, he added—"I shall expect satisfaction for the injury you have done me."

"I might well refuse it," replied Randulph; "but I am too eager for vengeance myself to do so. You shall have the satisfaction you seek as soon as you please."

"To-morrow morning, then, at the earliest hour—at five—in Tothill Fields," said Villiers.

"I will be there," replied Randulph.

And, quitting the beau, he rejoined Hilda, to whom he offered his arm. They walked down the avenue together, Jacob following close beside them. Hilda allowed her hand to remain in his, while he poured the warmest protestations of attachment into her ear. She did not attempt to check him; and perhaps it would be difficult to say which of the two felt the most regret when that brief dream of happiness was ended, as they emerged into the lighted vista.

Almost immediately on entering the great walk, they met Sir Norfolk and Lady Brabazon and the rest of the party. Her ladyship was at first greatly confused at seeing Randulph, but she instantly guessed what had happened, and tried to put a good face on the matter. Advancing to Hilda, she hastily inquired what had happened; but the latter turned coldly from her, and taking the arm of Sir Norfolk Salusbury, desired to be led home.

"Your ladyship is perfectly aware of the peril in which I have been placed," she said. "But I have been delivered from it by the courage and address of Mr. Crew."

"Before you go, Miss Scarve," said Lady Brabazon, "I beseech you to give me some explanation of what has happened."

"It must suffice, then, to say, that Mr. Villiers has attempted to carry me off," replied Hilda—"but his purpose has been defeated."

"What is this I hear!" cried Sir Norfolk. "Mr. Villiers guilty of so base an attempt? I will go in search of him instantly!"

"I have undertaken the punishment of Mr. Villiers' offence, sir," said Randulph.

"You have an account to settle with me yourself, sir," rejoined Sir Norfolk, sternly.

"I will settle it at five o'clock to-morrow morning, in Tothill Fields," replied Randulph, in a low tone, "after I have arranged with Mr. Villiers."

"Be it so," replied Sir Norfolk.

And he strode off with Hilda, followed by Jacob; while Randulph, without staying to exchange a word with Lady Brabazon, walked away in the opposite direction.

CHAPTER XI.

RANDULPH WORSTS BEAU VILLIERS IN A DUEL IN TOTHILL FIELDS; AND IS WORSTED HIMSELF IN A SECOND DUEL BY SIR NORFOLK SALUSBURY.

On quitting Vauxhall, Randulph made the best of his way home, agitated by a crowd of tumultuous thoughts. Abel had retired to rest more than an hour ago, but Trussell was not yet come home. Telling Mr. Jukes, therefore, that he must see his younger uncle directly, he set off again without a moment's delay, and taking a boat at Lambeth Stairs, rowed to the nearest point to Covent Garden. He then hurried to Tom's Coffee-house, where he found his uncle at supper in a box by himself, and proceeded to relate to him all that had occurred.

"A pretty adventure!" exclaimed Trussell, at the close of the recital. An abduction prevented, and a couple of duels! I'm sorry I wasn't with you, that I might have taken one of the latter off your hands. It'll be a mortal conflict with the beau. I'm glad you've had lessons from Hewitt. He told me himself, not many days ago, that you were one of his best scholars, and had as strong a wrist and as quick an eye as any man he knew."

"I have no fear of the result in either case," replied Randulph.

"I'm glad you're so confident," said Trussell; "but neither of your antagonists are to be despised. Take a glass of punch—they brew famously here—well, as you please. We must make arrangements instanter. Our best plan will be to go to Hewitt, and tell him to be in the field with swords and a surgeon at the appointed hour."

Emptying the rummer of punch before him, he called to the drawer, paid him, and, taking his nephew's arm, they set forth. Mr. Hewitt lived in Leicester-street, Leicester-fields—now Leicester-square. He was in bed, but they soon knocked him up, and explaining their business, he entered upon it immediately.

"I will be sure to be on the ground at the time appointed, and will bring Mr. Molson, the surgeon, with me," said Hewitt. "He will take care of you in case of accident. But I don't apprehend any such to you, because I know what you can do. You shall have my favourite German blade—here it is," he added, taking down a sword. "This is the strongest and lightest sword I ever handled, and equal to any Spanish tuck. Be sure you come coolly into the field. The best swordsman that ever fought will be worsted if he is in a passion. You'll need judgment as well as skill to-morrow, and take care you do not disorder it in any way. Mr. Villiers is a very skilful fencer, but he is likely enough to be in a passion. As to Sir Norfolk, you will find him calm as death. He is a far more dangerous adversary than the other."

"Far more dangerous," echoed Trussell.

"Sir Norfolk being so much taller than yourself," pursued the fencing-master, "the best way when you intend to make a thrust at him will be to come to half sword, you will then be within distance. If you act on the defensive, engage only five inches, and keep him at that distance. You understand?"

"Perfectly," replied Randulph.

"The best thrust you can make at him will be seconde, or carte under the shell, or you may dart your sword as I have taught you. And now I recommend you to go to rest. Think no more of the duel, but sleep soundly, and come to the field as fresh as a lark."

Randulph smiled at the fencing-master's advice, and having arranged a meeting at the Horseferry, Westminster, opposite Lambeth Stairs, at half-past four o'clock, he took his departure with his uncle. They reached home in about half an hour, and Mr. Jukes expressed great delight at seeing them. It had been previously agreed, for fear of mistake, that Trussell should sit up all night, and call his nephew in sufficient time in the morning, and he therefore ordered Mr. Jukes to bring him a bottle of brandy, and a large jug of cold water. The butler obeyed, and took the opportunity of inquiring whether anything was the matter, but received no direct answer.

On retiring to his own room, Randulph threw himself into a chair, and turned over the events of the day. Amid a multitude of dark and disagreeable thoughts, there was one that was bright and cheering. He had seen Hilda—avowed his passion—and received an assurance that he was not indifferent to her. This thought buoyed him up, and made him regard with indifference the danger to which he was exposed.

His most painful reflections were connected with his mother, and knowing the anguish she would experience if anything should happen to him, he sat down and wrote a letter, full of filial affection and tenderness, to be delivered to her in case of his fall. This done, he threw himself on his couch, but his mind was too much disturbed to allow him to sleep.

Long before it was light, he arose and dressed himself, and when Trussell entered the room, he was on his knees at the bedside, at prayer. On rising, he gave the letter he had written to the charge of his uncle, and they crept down stairs as softly as they could, for fear of disturbing any one in the house. They then proceeded to the dining-room, where Trussell swallowed a glass of brandy to keep the cold out of his stomach, and recommended his nephew to do the same to steady his hand, but the latter, doubting the efficacy of the prescription, declined it. Their hope of getting away proved fallacious, for as they entered the hall on their way to the outer door, they found Abel standing there, wrapped in his dressing-gown.

"Randulph," he said, eyeing his nephew severely—"you are going to fight a duel. It is useless to deny it. I am sure you are."

"I shall not attempt to deny it, sir," replied Randulph. "I am."

"He is going to fight two duels, brother," said Trussell, emboldened by the brandy he had just swallowed.

"Two duels!" echoed Abel—"then he is doubly foolish—doubly culpable. Randulph, you are about to commit a very sinful, and very foolish action, and though you may be justified in what you do by the laws of honour, and the usages of society, you will not be justified before Heaven."

"Really, my dear sir," said Trussell, "you view this matter much too seriously."

"Not a whit," replied Abel; "Randulph might stop if he would. But he would rather run the risk of offending his Maker than man."

"Uncle," said Randulph, "I cannot now argue with you; but I have good reasons for what I am about to do."

"No reason can warrant bloodshed," said Abel, sternly. "Since you are deaf to my counsels, go. Yet think what a blow it will be to your mother, if she finds on her arrival that she has lost her son."

"I *have* thought of that, uncle," replied Randulph; "and I have left a letter with my uncle Trussell. Perhaps you will now permit me to commit its charge to you?"

"Here it is, sir," said Trussell, handing him the letter. "Time presses. We must be gone. We hope to be back again with you at breakfast, and to make a hearty and merry meal. We are quite sorry to have disturbed you. Good morning, sir."

Abel threw a severe and disgusted look at him, and then turning to Randulph, pressed his hand affectionately, and said, "I hope I *may* see you at breakfast, and with no blood on your soul."

And with these words, he walked away.

"Devilish unlucky we should meet him!" said Trussell, forcing a laugh, as they quitted the house. "I suppose Jukes must have suspected something, and called him up, for I don't think he could have overheard us."

Randulph made no reply, for Abel's parting speech had sunk deep into his breast, and they proceeded in silence towards the palace stairs.

It was a fresh and beautiful morning, though the sun was scarcely risen, and a thin silvery mist hung like a veil over the smooth surface of the water. Two or three watermen were lying asleep in their tilts, and they roused one of them, who speedily rowed them to the opposite bank, near which they found Mr. Hewitt, with two brace of swords under his arm, in addition to the one by his side, accompanied by a tall, stout man, with a red face, dressed in a well-powdered wig, and a suit of purple velvet, and carrying a gold-headed cane, who was introduced as Mr. Molson, the surgeon.

"You look famously," said the fencing-master to Randulph. "Follow my instructions, and you're sure to come off victoriously."

The party then walked along the Horseferry-road, which speedily brought them to Tothill-fields. They were the first on the ground, and Mr. Hewitt, after looking about for a short time, discovered a spot excellently adapted for the encounters.

By this time, the sun having risen, the morning's early promise of beauty was fully confirmed. The spot selected for the combats commanded a fine view of Westminster Abbey, which reared its massive body and tall towers above a range of mean habitations masking its base. Cawing jackdaws in clouds wheeled in the sunny air above its pinnacles. A calmer or more beautiful scene could not be imagined.

Randulph's reflections were interrupted by the approach of two persons from the left of the fields, who proved to be Sir Norfolk Salusbury and Cordwell Firebras. Sir Norfolk bowed stiffly to Randulph, and also to Trussell, and seeing that the beau was not arrived, said to the former, "As I am first in the field, I am entitled to the first bout."

"I am sorry I cannot oblige you, Sir Norfolk," replied Randulph: "but I *must* give Mr. Villiers priority."

"Well, as you please, sir," said the baronet, walking aside.

Cordwell Firebras then advanced to Randulph.

"I am here as Sir Norfolk's second," he said; "but I hope the matter may only serve as a little breathing for you both before breakfast. It is an idle quarrel. We must talk about Villiers's attempt anon. But here he is."

As he spoke, two chairs were seen approaching from the lower end of the fields. When they came within a hundred yards of the party, they stopped, and from the first issued Mr. Villiers, and from the other Sir Bulkeley Price. Mr. Cripps walked by the side of his master's chair, bearing a water-bottle and a glass. The new-comers advanced slowly towards the party, and Mr. Villiers, having bowed with much haughtiness to Randulph, gracefully saluted the rest of the company.

"Have we anything to wait for, gentlemen?" he asked.

"Nothing," replied Trussell; "we are all ready."

"To business, then," rejoined the beau.

At a motion from his master, Mr. Cripps advanced towards him, and receiving his clouded cane, proceeded to divest him of his coat, leaving him on a light striped silk waistcoat, with sleeves of the same material. Randulph, meantime, threw off his upper garment, and rolled up the shirt sleeve on his right arm. Mr

Hewitt then stepped up to him, and gave him the German sword he had promised; while Mr. Villiers received an exquisitely tempered blade from the valet. These preparations made, the seconds and bystanders fell back a few paces, Trussell, Firebras, and Hewitt standing on one side, and the two baronets on the other, while the surgeon stood at a little distance in the rear with Mr. Cripps.

Advancing towards each other, the combatants saluted, and in another moment their blades were crossed, and several rapid passes exchanged. The spectators watched the conflict with the greatest interest, for both parties appeared admirably matched, and the beau's superior skill was counterbalanced by Randulph's extraordinary vigour and quickness. Thrusts were made and parried on both sides, but not a single hit was given, until Randulph, finding his adversary engaged in tierce with a high point, made a firm thrust in carte over the arm, and passed his sword through the fleshy part of the other's shoulder. At this successful hit, the seconds rushed forward, but before they reached the spot, the beau's sword fell from his grasp.

"It is nothing," said Villiers, surrendering himself to the surgeon, who likewise hurried towards him; "but I acknowledge myself defeated."

While the beau's wound was bound up by the surgeon, and he was led to the chair by Mr. Cripps, Sir Norfolk Salusbury, who had been a watchful spectator of the conflict, stepped forward, and said to Randulph, "Whatever may be the issue of our encounter, Mr. Crew, I shall declare that in the combat which has just taken place, you have conducted yourself like a man of honour and spirit."

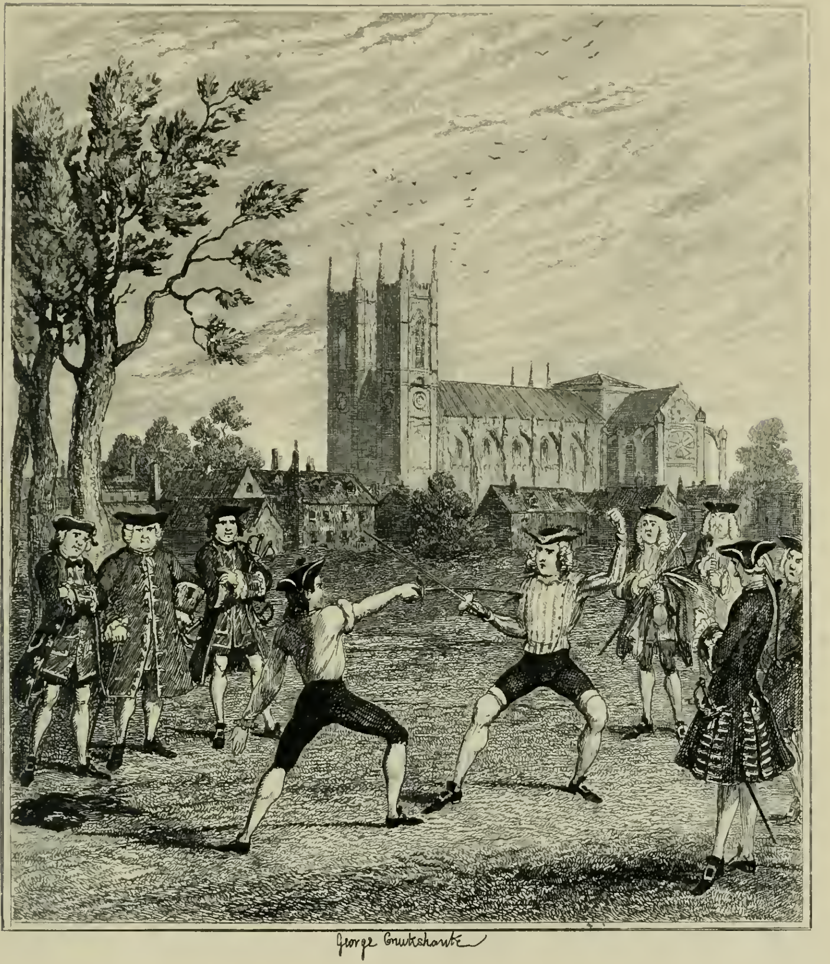
"I am glad to receive the acknowledgment from you, Sir Norfolk," replied Randulph, bowing.

"Pray do not hurry yourself on my account," said the baronet, courteously.

"I am quite ready for you," replied Randulph. "What I have gone through has only served to steady my nerves."

With the assistance of Firebras, who had come over to him, Sir Norfolk then took off his coat, waistcoat, and shirt, and in this state presented so extraordinary an appearance, that Randulph could scarcely repress a smile. The punctilious old knight's first step was to deliver his sword to Mr. Hewitt, who, on measuring it with that of Randulph, found that it exceeded the latter in length by two inches. He therefore gave him one of his own swords, and Sir Norfolk beating an appeal with his right foot, bade his youthful opponent come on.

Having gone through their salutes with the greatest formality, they commenced the combat with the utmost caution. Sir Norfolk acted chiefly upon the defensive, and contented himself almost entirely with parrying the thrusts aimed at him. Ran-



George Cruikshank

The Duel in Tothill Fields.

dulph soon found that he had a formidable antagonist to deal with, and altering his plan, tried to compel him to attack him. He made several feints with great dexterity, and just touched his adversary's breast with an inside thrust in carte, causing a slight effusion of blood.

This had the effect of rousing the old baronet into exertion, and in his turn he became the assailant. He attacked Randulph with such force and fury, that he drove him back several paces. The young man returned to the charge, and pressed his adversary in his turn, so that he regained his ground; but while making a pass in carte, his sword was turned near the wrist by a dexterous and sudden lunge on the part of the baronet, whose point entered his side below the elbow, and inflicted a severe wound.

Maddened by the pain, Randulph continued to fight desperately, but the seconds rushed between the combatants, and interposing their blades, declared that the strife must terminate, and that Sir Norfolk was the victor. The baronet immediately dropped his sword, and Randulph, whose strength had been fast failing, fell to the ground insensible.

END OF THE SECOND BOOK.

BOOK THE THIRD.

ABEL BEECHCROFT.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT BECAME OF RANDULPH AFTER THE DUEL—HOW HILDA RECEIVED THE INTELLIGENCE THAT RANDULPH HAD BEEN WOUNDED IN THE DUEL; AND WHAT PASSED BETWEEN CORDWELL FIREBRAS AND THE MISER.

Assistance was promptly afforded Randulph, after his fall, by the surgeon. Placed in Sir Bulkeley Price's chair, he was removed to the nearest tavern in the Horseferry-road, where his wound was dressed. Sir Norfolk Salusbury, who expressed great concern about him, followed him thither as soon as he had bound up his own wound, and put on his habiliments, and appeared greatly relieved when the surgeon gave him his positive assurance that no danger whatever was to be apprehended.

"Is that Sir Norfolk Salusbury?" asked Randulph, in a faint voice.

"It is," replied the old baronet, stepping forward.

"Our quarrel is now at an end, I trust?" said the young man, extending his hand, which the other grasped cordially.

"In toto," replied Sir Norfolk; "and not merely is it at an end, but a friendship, I hope, has commenced between us from this date."

"I shall hold it cheaply purchased on my part, if it proves so," replied Randulph, smiling gratefully.

"My first business shall be to call on Hilda Scarve, to tell her how bravely you have combated in her defence," said Sir Norfolk.

"You will for ever oblige me," replied the young man, trying to raise himself, but sinking back the next moment, exhausted by the effort.

"I must interdict further conversation, gentlemen," interposed the surgeon; "the bleeding has recommenced, and the pulse has risen. If I am left alone with my patient for a few hours, I will answer for his doing well, but not otherwise."

The room was then cleared, and Sir Norfolk invited the others to breakfast with him at his lodgings in Abingdon-street; and Trussell, finding that his attendance was not required, but that he was rather in the way than otherwise, accepted the invitation.

Everything belonging to Sir Norfolk was as formal as himself.

He had an old servant, the stiffest and tallest of his class, who moved like an automaton worked by rusty springs. Moreover, he had a favourite old greyhound, who would allow no one to caress him but his master; and a peacock, his especial favourite, which used to strut backwards and forwards with him for hours together in a little garden at the back of the house. Inhospitality formed no part of the worthy old baronet's character, and a very plentiful repast was set before his guests. Despising tea and coffee as effeminate and enervating beverages, he nevertheless offered them to his guests, but they were declined by all, and the light claret substituted, greatly preferred. A few bottles of this pleasant drink served to wash down the broiled salmon, the slices of mutton-ham, the rump-steaks, the kidneys, and anchovy toasts, with which the board was spread. A cold sirloin of beef, and a veal and ham pasty, flanked by a tankard of stout Welsh ale, stood on the sideboard, and to these Sir Bulkeley Price applied himself, and declared he had not made so good a breakfast since he arrived in town.

"Your early rising has given you an appetite, Sir Bulkeley," said the elder baronet.

"Perhaps so," replied the other, again applying to the tankard; "but your ale is excellent—quite equal to my own. I wish I had sent some up from Flint."

Aqua vitæ in small glasses was then handed round, and partaken of by all except the host. After this, the party broke up, Trussell setting out to see how his nephew went on, and Sir Norfolk and Firebras proceeding to the Little Sanctuary, to call on the miser.

Not having seen his daughter over night, for he did not wait up for her, Mr. Scarve only became acquainted with the beau's attempt to carry her off on the following morning. The relation of the matter exasperated him in the highest degree, and when Sir Norfolk Salusbury and Firebras were ushered in by Jacob, they found him in a state of great excitement. Without allowing the baronet time to utter a word, he rushed up to him, and, in a voice half choked by fury, exclaimed—"Have you killed him?—have you killed him?"

"Do you allude to Mr. Randulph Crew, sir?" demanded Sir Norfolk, calmly.

"No, to the beau—to Villiers!" rejoined the miser.

"I have not engaged with him," replied the old bachelor; "but he has met with due chastisement from Mr. Crew."

"I am glad to hear it," rejoined the miser; "but I should have been better pleased if his villany had been punished by any other person. You, yourself, are in some measure to blame for this misadventure, Sir Norfolk."

"I can make due allowance for your excited feelings, Mr. Scarve," returned the baronet; "but—"

"'Sdeath, sir!" interrupted the miser; "why did you let Hilda out of your sight? Since you undertook the charge of her, it was your duty to keep strict watch over her."

"I feel there is reason in what you say, Mr. Scarve," replied Sir Norfolk; "nevertheless—"

"I want no explanation," cried the miser, fiercely; "it is sufficient for me that the thing has happened; and look how it stands. My daughter is entrusted to your care—is all but carried off by a libertine, from under your very nose—and is rescued by the very person of all others I wished her to avoid, and against whom I cautioned you. Can anything be imagined more vexatious?"

"It is as vexatious to me as it can be to yourself, Mr. Scarve," replied Sir Norfolk, sternly, for his forbearance was fast waning; "but I must beg of you to use more moderation in your tones and language. Recollect whom you are addressing."

"I ought to have recollected your blind and stupid punctiliousness, which so easily makes you the dupe of designers, before I committed my daughter to your charge," cried the miser, provoked by the other's haughtiness.

"Whew!" exclaimed Firebras, with a slight whistle. "There'll be another duel presently if he goes on at this rate."

"Mr. Scarve, I wish you a good morning," said the old baronet, bowing stiffly, "you shall hear from me ere long."

"Stay, Sir Norfolk!" cried Hilda, rushing up to him; "my father does not know what he says. For my sake, let it pass."

"Ay, ay, Sir Norfolk, let it pass," whispered Firebras. "Mr. Scarve's intemperate conduct should move your pity rather than your anger."

"I believe you are right, sir," replied the old baronet, in the same tone; "I will regard it as a mere infirmity of temper."

"Sir Norfolk," said Hilda, speaking with forced calmness—"some menacing words passed between you and Randulph Crew, last night. You say he has risked his life on my account, and has punished my assailant. I trust that nothing has passed, or may pass, between you and him? Promise me this, Sir Norfolk."

"Sir Norfolk may safely give that promise now," remarked Firebras.

"How mean you, sir," cried Hilda, becoming as pale as death. "Have you met him, Sir Norfolk!—have you fought?"

The old baronet averted his head.

"I will answer for him," said Firebras—"they have met."

"But nothing has happened?" cried Hilda. "Randulph is safe,—is he not?"

"I did my best not to touch him," replied the old baronet, reluctantly; "but he put me so hardly to it, that—that—"

"Well!" cried Hilda, breathlessly.

"After receiving a scratch myself, which a plaster has cured," pursued Sir Norfolk, "I slightly wounded him."

"And this is the reward of his devotion to me!" cried Hilda.

"It is nothing—nothing whatever, Miss Scarve," rejoined Firebras; "the surgeon says he will be out again in a week."

"I am glad you hit him," said the miser; "it will teach him to meddle where he has no concern in future."

"I was grieved to do so," replied Sir Norfolk; "but he forced me to it. I never crossed swords with a braver young man. You have formed an erroneous opinion of him, Mr. Scarve."

"I have formed no opinion of him at all," rejoined the miser.

"You are sure he is not dangerously wounded, Sir Norfolk?" cried Hilda.

"Quite sure," replied the old baronet.

"Thank Heaven!" she exclaimed. And with a gasp for utterance, she fell into the arms of her aunt, who stood close beside her, and who bore her out of the room.

"It requires no conjurer to tell how affairs stand in that quarter, Mr. Scarve," observed Cordwell Firebras.

"It is plain she loves the young man," said Sir Norfolk—"and for my own part I think him in every way worthy of her."

"Worthy or not, he shall never have her," returned the miser, sullenly.

"It is not for me to dictate to you, Mr. Scarve," rejoined Sir Norfolk; "nor would I presume to hint the course I think you ought to pursue; but being satisfied that your daughter's affections are engaged to this young man, unless your objections to him are insuperable, I hope you will not interfere with their happiness."

"My objections to him *are* insuperable, Sir Norfolk," rejoined the miser, coldly.

"I am truly sorry to hear it," replied the old baronet.

"Excuse me, Sir Norfolk," said Firebras, seeing that the other was about to take leave, "I have a few words to say to Mr. Scarve."

Sir Norfolk then bowed, quitted the room, and was ushered to the door by Jacob.

While this was passing, Cordwell Firebras drew a stool towards the chair which the miser had just taken.

"I presume, Mr. Scarve, there are no eaves-droppers?" he said, glancing at the door.

"I hope not," replied the miser, who eyed him with great repugnance; "but if you have any secret matters to discuss, you had better speak in a low tone."

"Very well," resumed Firebras, complying with the hint, "we must have a little talk together about this young man—this Randulph Crew."

"I guessed what was coming," groaned the miser.

"You cannot now mistake your daughter's partiality for him," pursued Firebras; "and on the other hand, I can tell you that he is devotedly attached to her."

"Likely enough," replied the miser; "but I will never consent to his union with her."

"You *must* consent if I require you to do so," said Firebras, coldly.

The miser moved uneasily in his chair.

"You will not pretend to dispute my power to compel you to give her to him?" pursued Firebras. "I have but to produce a certain paper that you know of, and she is his."

"Not so fast," rejoined the miser. "You hold this document *in terrorem* over me—but how if I resist it?"

"You cannot resist it," replied Firebras—"you have bound yourself too strongly. Let me remind you of the packet delivered to you by Randulph Crew. Your daughter, too, will side with me. I have only to acquaint her with certain facts, and you well know what the consequences will be."

"Well, take her," cried the miser—"take her,—but you will have her without a penny."

"Scarcely so," rejoined Firebras. "Randulph shall have her, and shall also have the fortune you agreed to settle upon her."

"I agreed to give her to the son of a man of fortune, and to make a settlement upon her corresponding with his property," said the miser; "but this young man has nothing."

"I have something to say on that head," rejoined Firebras. "Randulph, you are aware, assigned his own life-interest in the entailed property to his father's creditors."

"I know it—I know it," said the miser, hastily; "more fool he for doing so."

"But do you know who those creditors are?" said Firebras.

"No," replied the miser; "do you?"

"I do," replied Firebras, smiling significantly; "and I know, moreover, how the property might be recovered from them."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the miser, staring at him.

"What should you say if Randulph were again to be put in possession of his estates, and three thousand a year?" pursued Firebras. "Would you then feel disposed to fulfil your engagement?"

"It would make a material difference, certainly," said the miser. "But you are merely saying this to try me."

"No such thing," rejoined Firebras; "I am perfectly serious. Now mark me, Mr. Scarve. A few thousand pounds, will settle the matter with these creditors, and Randulph's property will be unincumbered."

"And you will advance those few thousand pounds for him, of course?" said the miser, drily.

"No; you will," returned Firebras. "It will be your interest to do so.

"Hum!" exclaimed the other.

"If he espouses your daughter, he must espouse the Jacobite cause also," pursued Firebras; "that we must both insist upon. His mother will be in town to-day, and we shall have her to back us."

"You lay out your schemes very fairly," said the miser; "but I am persuaded they will fall to the ground. Prove to me that Randulph can regain his property; and let me hear from his own lips an avowal that he will join our party, and I then may begin to think of giving my consent."

"It shall be my business to do so," replied Firebras; "and now, good morning. Most likely I may call again in the evening."

And putting on his hat, he took his departure without summoning Jacob.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. CREW—HER SOLICITUDE ABOUT HER SON; AND HER CONVERSATION WITH ABEL.

In the course of the afternoon, Randulph was transported to his uncle's house at Lambeth. He was feverish and restless, and kept constantly inquiring after his mother, declaring he was sure she had arrived, but was purposely kept out of his sight. An opiate having been administered, he presently began to experience its effects, and sank into a profound slumber, from which he did not awake till late in the following day.

When he opened his eyes, he found the surgeon seated by his bedside, feeling his pulse.

"You are wonderfully better, and wholly free from fever, sir," said Mr. Molson; "and if you can promise me to keep all emotion under control, I think I may yield to the entreaties of one who is most anxious to see you."

"My mother!" exclaimed Randulph. "Ah! admit her by all means. Her presence will calm, rather than excite me."

"I am not quite so sure of that," hesitated Molson; "however, I will risk it."

And, quitting the room, he returned the next moment and introduced Mrs. Crew, who uttered a slight cry, and would have rushed forward, but he detained her, whispering,—"Remember your promise, madam. It was only on the understanding that you would maintain your composure that I allowed you to see him."

Thus cautioned, Mrs. Crew softly approached the bed, and taking the hand which her son extended to her, pressed it to her lips. She said nothing, but her bosom heaved quickly, and Randulph felt the hot tears falling fast upon his hand.

"Do not distress yourself, dearest mother," he said; "I am already so well that if this gentleman would allow me, I could get up."

"Your son is doing exceedingly well, madam," said Mr. Molson, significantly; "and if we pay him due attention, he may leave his bed in three or four days."

Roused by this remark, Mrs. Crew looked up, and fixed a glance full of inexpressible tenderness and affection upon her son. Though her countenance bore traces of much sorrow and anxiety, she was still a very handsome woman, and had a tall, fine figure; full as became her years, yet not so full as to interfere with the gracefulness of its proportions. She was two years younger than Trussell, being just forty-four, and might have been thought much younger, but for the care-worn expression above mentioned, which, while it added age to her features, lent interest to them at the same time. Her lineaments strikingly resembled those of her son, but were more delicately formed, and her eyes were blue, large, and of the purest water. She was dressed in deep mourning, of simple material, and wore her own hair, originally of a bright and beautiful brown, but now mingled with grey.

Charms such as Mrs. Crew possessed, must, it is scarcely necessary to say, have won her many admirers when they were at their best; and some four-and-twenty years ago, she was sought on all hands, and had many brilliant alliances proposed to her; but her heart was early engaged to him to whom she was eventually united; and she continued true to his memory, for though two of her old admirers found her out in her widowhood, and renewed the proposals made in the meridian of her attractions, and though both these offers were advantageous, while her own worldly circumstances, as has been shown, were so much reduced as almost to justify a marriage of convenience, both were unhesitatingly rejected.

Mrs. Crew partook of the good qualities of both her brothers; possessing the sound judgment and kindliness of Abel, without his asperity, and much of the good nature, without the worldliness of Trussell. Throughout the whole of her married life, her conduct had been exemplary. Devotedly attached to her husband, she strove, by the care which she paid to the management of the affairs entrusted to her, to make up in some degree for his extravagance; and though she was unable entirely to accomplish her object, she did much to retard his progress towards ruin. Mr. Crew was one of those persons, who, whatever their fortune, will live beyond it. Warm-hearted, and hospitable, he kept open house, a dozen hunters, twice as many servants, a pack of hounds, and was not over particular in the choice of his associates. The consequence was, that he speedily became embarrassed, and, instead of retrenching, raised money in the readiest way he could, and lived harder and more recklessly than ever. He was fond of horse-racing and cock-fighting, and though by no means a gambler, frequently lost more at play than a prudent gentleman would care to lose. As Randulph grew up, he perceived the necessity of retrenchment, and, for nearly a year, decidedly changed his mode of life. But he was not adapted by nature to follow up such a course with perseverance. Long before the year was over, he began to find his plans of economy irksome, and at the end of it, launched into his old expenses. About this time, some designing persons got hold of him. Advances were made on most usurious terms, and he soon became inextricably involved. For the last two years of his life, he drank hard, discontinued most of the healthful exercises to which he had been accustomed, seldom hunted, and amused himself chiefly with bowling. This fatal course soon began to tell upon him. The infirmities of age came on before their time, and he died under fifty, with every appearance of an old man. On examination, his affairs were found frightfully embarrassed, and Randulph, who had just come of age, having stated his intentions to his father before his death, and obtained his mother's assent to the arrangement, assigned the whole of the entailed property to the creditors, retaining only for himself what would barely afford him the means of living. Mrs. Crew, it has been stated, had a small separate property of her own, settled upon her by her father at the time of her marriage; but, between mother and son, they had not now in hundreds a year, what Mr. Crew had once had in thousands.

Throughout all the trying circumstances above narrated, Mrs. Crew had conducted herself admirably. She never irritated her husband with reproaches, nor wearied him with advice, which her good sense told her would be unavailing; but assisted him as far as was in her power, and cheered him in his distresses, taking care not to let her own affliction be apparent. At no time did she ever complain of him, even to her brothers. Indeed, she did not complain of ill-treatment, for Mr. Crew was sincerely attached to her, and but for his imprudence, they might have been as happy a couple as ever lived. The sweetness and amiability of her disposition was evinced on all occasions, but never so strongly as during the last two years of her husband's life, when his debilitated constitution, and pressing cares impaired his naturally good temper, and rendered him fretful, and impatient of trifles.

The tenderest attachment subsisted between Randulph and his mother. Always treated with confidence, he had no reserve from her, but regarded her in the light both of a parent and friend.

Mrs. Crew remained nearly an hour by her son's bedside, gazing at him, and answering the questions he put to her about her journey and other matters, as briefly as possible; for, in compliance with the surgeon's injunctions, she avoided anything like continuous discourse. At length, discerning some slight symptoms of fatigue about him, she pressed his hand softly, and quitted the room.

On going down stairs, she proceeded to the library, where she found her brothers. Trussell anxiously inquired how she had left the patient.

"He is doing well, I believe," she replied; "but oh! brother, what a meeting has this been! I trust it is the last duel he will ever be engaged in."

"I think he has come off famously," replied Trussell. "I called to inquire after Villiers last night, and I understand he is likely to be laid up for a fortnight at the least."

"I am glad to hear it," observed Abel; "and I wish from my heart that Randulph's wound had been more severe."

"Oh, brother! why such a wish as that?" exclaimed Mrs. Crew.

"Because I would have his first duel his last, sister," said Abel. "I entirely disapprove of the practice of duelling, and think it utterly opposed to the religious principles we profess."

"The duel is a necessity imposed upon society," said Trussell, "and, in my opinion, never can be dispensed with, unless a total revolution takes place in our manners and habits. It is the only check that holds certain characters in restraint, and though the practice may be carried too far, and swords be drawn on trifling occasions, a great good is accomplished by the recognition and maintenance of a code of honour, to which all gentlemen must subscribe, and any infraction of which involves the loss of social position. Moralists may preach as they please, but as long as society is constituted as it is at present—as long as such men as Villiers exist—duelling must and will prevail."

"There are other modes of avenging an injury besides violence," replied Abel; "and I trust society, in some more enlightened age, will fix such a brand upon the evil-doer, that it shall be in itself sufficient punishment for his offence. As we are now circumstanced, it may be impossible for a gentleman to avoid a quarrel; but he should never voluntarily seek it."

"I am bound to say, in Randulph's justification," rejoined Trussell, "since you both view the matter in so grave a light, and I say it advisedly, that he has acted throughout this affair as becomes a gentleman and a man of honour. Such is the opinion of both his adversaries—and such is my own opinion. You have reason to be proud of him, Sophia."

"I once thought so," she replied, sadly.

"And, believe me, he has done nothing to forfeit your good opinion," rejoined Trussell; "but much that should raise it."

"I am not alone annoyed at the duels," said Abel "but at the cause of them. It was my particular wish that Randulph should avoid Hilda Scarve—my expressed wish; and now he has been so circumstanced with her, that any feeling he might entertain towards her will be greatly strengthened. Trussell, you have laid up for your charge a great store of unhappiness. He will soon be cured of the wound he has received in this encounter,—but will his passion for Hilda be equally soon cured?"

"That is impossible to say," replied Trussell; "some men easily get over a disappointment in love."

"And others, never!" rejoined Abel, bitterly.

"I meant no allusion to you, sir," cried Trussell, reddening,—"none whatever."

"Nor did I suspect you of doing so," returned Abel; "but if Randulph loves sincerely, he will feel the blow to his dying day."

"An if he *does* love sincerely, brother, why—oh! why—interfere between him and the object of his affections?" said Mrs. Crew.

"I do not interfere with him—God forbid I should do so!" rejoined Abel. "Let him marry Hilda, if he will. Let him obtain her father's consent, if he can."

"But will you give *your* consent, brother?" cried Mrs. Crew.

"No!" replied Abel, emphatically, "I will not. I told him, when I first saw this girl, to avoid her on pain of my displeasure. He has disobeyed me, and must take the consequences. But what matters my consent? I will have nothing to do with the affair. I wash my hands of it altogether. I have my own reasons, which suffice to myself, for objecting to the union; but I will not be placed in a painful and ungracious position, and be compelled to oppose it. I will have nothing to do with it—nothing whatever."

"Randulph will incur your displeasure if he marries Hilda, will he not?" asked Mrs. Crew.

"Most assuredly," replied Abel; "I will never see him or her again. I will not be pressed to assign a reason for this determination; nor will I say more than I have done. I wish him to be wholly uninfluenced by me. Neither will I have it said that I have interfered with his happiness."

"And yet, believe me, it will be both said, and felt so, brother," rejoined Mrs. Crew. "Beware, lest you inflict a blow upon your nephew as severe as that you have endured yourself."

Abel uttered a sharp cry and walked away, while Trussell looked at his sister to intimate she had gone too far. She instantly arose, and going up to Abel, took his hand, nor did he withdraw it from her.

"Pardon me, brother," she said, "if I have spoken what is painful to you; but I am anxious to spare you further affliction I know, though you have tried to case your heart in armour of proof, how tender it is—how readily wounded. I have wept fo your unhappy lot, and would do all in my power to avert further distress from you. If, as I have reason to believe, Randulph is devotedly attached to Hilda Scarve, I am certain from what I know of his disposition, that a disappointment in obtaining her will blight him for life, and I am sure it would be only increasing your own unhappiness, to feel that you had made him miserable."

"But I do not make him miserable, sister!" cried Abel sharply. "He is a free agent, and can marry whom he pleases, without my consent."

"I have told you he will never do so, brother," said Mrs. Crew. "His future happiness or misery rests with you."

"Sophia, I will not endure this," said Abel, sternly; "and I request the subject may never be mentioned again. I have no desire to wound your feelings, but the truth must not be hidden from you. Since his arrival in town, Randulph has exhibited such a turn for gaiety and dissipation, that I think it would be very unwise in him to marry at all—at least, at present."

"If he cannot marry advantageously," interposed Trussell, "I am clearly of Abel's opinion. His tastes and habits are rather expensive."

"Expensive!" exclaimed Mrs. Crew. "They *were* most moderate."

"Then he has a slight taste for play," pursued Trussell; "and is decidedly partial to society and amusement."

"I'll hurry him back into the country as soon as he is able to move!" cried Mrs. Crew, greatly alarmed.

"And you'll do wisely," said Abel.

"I don't think he'll go," rejoined Trussell, laughing; "and if he does, he'll soon find his way back again. He's too fond of town to be long away from it."

"Oh! how changed he must be!" exclaimed Mrs. Crew.

"He owes it all to his uncle Trussell," rejoined Abel, sharply.

"Then he owes me a great deal," replied Trussell; "and I hope he wont forget the debt. I think the plan of hurrying him into the country quite wrong. If you wish Hilda to make a deep impression upon him, that will be the surest way to accomplish the object. In town, he has a thousand distractions. I cannot exactly say how he will stand with Lady Brabazon after this duel—but there's Kitty Conway, and he is sure to have plenty of new entanglements."

"Brother," cried Mrs. Crew—"you only furnish me with additional reasons for desiring to take him away."

"I am very sorry he ever came," said Abel; "it has disturbed the whole of my arrangements, and opened old wounds, which, though not closed, were yet not painful. Even Trussell has been unsettled by it."

"Not in the least, sir," replied Trussell. "I have enjoyed his visit amazingly; and should belie myself confoundedly, if I said otherwise. I wish I could prevail upon you to let him remain here a few months longer, and give him another hundred or so—and then——"

"Plunge him back again into poverty!" cried Abel, cutting him short. "What would be the use of such a course? What good purpose would it answer? He has apparently no wish to embark in any profession. And why should I furnish him with the means of continuing his career of dissipation? No. I will do no such thing."

"Will you see how he goes on for a month after his convalescence?" asked Trussell. "Surely, that is no great length of time to allow him."

"I will promise nothing," replied Abel. "And now, brother, I shall be glad to be left alone for a short time with Sophia."

"Willingly, sir," replied Trussell. And he quitted the room.

Abel then took a chair, and motioned his sister to seat herself beside him. For a few moments he continued silent, as if summoning up resolution to address her; at length, he spoke.

"You have alluded to past times, Sophia," he said, in faltering tones; "and have contrasted my position with that of your son, but you well know they are widely different. Nay, do not interrupt me—I know what you would say. Randulph has personal advantages which I never possessed, and which are sure to win him favour in the eyes of your sex. Besides, his nature does not resemble mine; his feelings are not so acute and concentrated; nor do I believe he could love so deeply. The love I entertained for Arabella Clinton was not the growth of a day—a month—a year—but the love of years. I had seen her opening beauties expand—had acquainted myself with her mind—ascertained her disposition, her temper—knew all her feelings, and persuaded myself she requited my love."

"And she did requite it, brother," replied Mrs. Crew. "She did love you."

"In mercy, do not tell me so!" cried Abel, becoming as pale as death. "I would rather think she hated me—deceived me; —but loved me!—that belief is only wanting to make me thoroughly wretched!"

"Calm yourself, dear brother," said Mrs. Crew. "I would not increase your unhappiness for the world; but I am persuaded that the examination of this subject, which, from unhappy circumstances, we have never hitherto been able to discuss, will, in the end, relieve you of much anxiety."

"I will try to bear it in that hope," replied Abel; "but the barbed arrow is too firmly and too deeply planted to be removed. You will only lacerate me further in the attempt."

"I will not be intimidated," rejoined Mrs. Crew. "I shall begin by telling you that it is your own fault that Arabella

Clinton was not your wife. You have alluded to the deep passion you entertained for her, and your doubts of her affection for you. I do not say she loved you with equal passion, because you were not a person to inspire such ardour, neither was she one to feel it, for her nature was frigid. But she loved you well enough to have been your wife; and what is more, she thoroughly respected you; and therefore there can be no doubt that you might have been happy."

"Go on!" groaned Abel.

"You will forgive me, if I speak plainly," pursued Mrs. Crew, "for I must do so to show you where you erred. Rating yourself too humbly, you pursued, as I conceive, a most unwise and dangerous plan, in order to test the sincerity of your mistress's attachment. Fearful she might accept you on the score of your wealth, you represented yourself as being in very moderate circumstances; and, while full of tenderness and affection, adopted not unfrequently a harsh and forbidding manner towards her."

"True, true!" cried Abel.

"You were both the victims of error," continued Mrs. Crew. "Deceived by your manner, she thought you had conceived a dislike for her, and strove to wean herself from all regard for you; while her efforts made you believe you were indifferent to her. All, however, might have come right, but for the fatal mistake of deluding her as to your circumstances. With her, wealth was of little importance, and she would have married you as readily poor as rich; but with her father it was otherwise."

"Her father was aware of my circumstances," said Abel, in a sombre tone.

"He was so," replied Mrs. Crew; "but it was his business to conceal them, for Arabella had a richer suitor, whom he preferred. Captivated by her beauty, Mr. Scarve proposed to her, and his suit was seconded by her father, who told her you were needy, sour-tempered, and indifferent to her. Doubly deceived, she hesitated. Instead of seeking an explanation, you avoided it, and retired to make way for your rival."

"I did so because I thought him preferred," said Abel.

"Several slight circumstances, I know, conspired to confirm you in your opinion," said Mrs. Crew; "but they were all devised by Mr. Clinton. A false construction was put upon your absence, and Arabella was induced to give her hand to Mr. Scarve."

"Why was I not told all this at the time?" cried Abel.

"Because I was not aware of it myself," replied Mrs. Crew "You may remember that this occurred during the period of my engagement to my poor husband, who was an old and intimate friend of Mr. Scarve's, and consequently, and not unnaturally, disliked by you. This produced a coolness between you. Besides, to be plain with you, I did not understand or estimate your character then as thoroughly as I do now. I thought you cold and repelling, and never gave you credit for the depth of feeling you have since exhibited. Neither had Mr. Scarve displayed himself in his true colours then. At that time he was passably good-looking, kept a tolerable establishment, and I really thought Arabella was better off than if she had married you. I was angry, too, that you had attempted to test her affections by misrepresenting your circumstances, and thought you rightly served in losing her. Hence arose the misunderstanding between us, which separated us to the present period."

"But how do you know Arabella's sentiments towards me were such as you describe?" asked Abel.

"I have it under her own hand," replied Mrs. Crew. "She wrote to me a full explanation of all the circumstances connected with this part of her life, stating how sincerely she had loved you, and how much she lamented that a mistake had separated her from you. From her letters, and from other information afforded me by my husband, I have been enabled to understand the whole case. You have been the victim of misunderstanding. But console yourself. A thousandth part of the suffering you have undergone would atone for a more grievous error than you have committed. Console yourself, I say. You were beloved by Arabella Clinton, and to the last, she entertained the sincerest regard for you."

"That is indeed a consolation to me," said Abel, melting into tears. "I am not ashamed to indulge this weakness in your presence, sister," he added, in a broken voice.

"Those tears will do you good," she replied, "and I pray you to indulge them freely. The past will not henceforth be so painful to contemplate; for, if I mistake not, your bitterest pang was the idea that you had never been loved."

"It was!" gasped Abel.

"And that has now been removed," replied Mrs. Crew. "Here are Arabella's letters," she added, giving him a small packet. "You will see from them how you have misunderstood her."

Abel took the letters, glanced at the superscription with a shudder, and placed them in his breast.

"I will read them," he said, "but not now."

"Does Hilda Scarve resemble her mother?" asked Mrs. Crew, after a pause.

"She is like her, but handsomer," replied Abel. "I have seen her upon two occasions lately, and she appears a very amiable girl."

"Then what objection can there be to an union between her and Randulph?" asked Mrs. Crew.

"I have said I will not be pressed on that head," rejoined

Abel, sternly. "*I* have an objection—a strong objection. What it is you shall know at another time."

"Heaven grant that these two young people may not be equally victims of a mistake with you and Arabella!" sighed Mrs. Crew.

At this moment, Mr. Jukes entered the room.

"Mr. Scarve's servant, Jacob Post, has called to inquire after Mr. Randulph," he said; "and understanding that you are here, madam, he craves permission to see you."

"May he come in, brother?" said Mrs. Crew.

"Certainly," was the reply.

And Jacob was ushered into the room.

"I'm glad to hear Mr. Randulph is gettin' on so well, ma'am," he said, with an uncouth reverence, to Mrs. Crew. "Lord lov'ee! how like you are to him to be sure."

"I hope your young mistress has got over the fright she underwent at Vauxhall, Jacob?" said Mrs. Crew.

"Why, yes, pretty well, thank'ee, ma'am," replied Jacob; "she looks rayther palish, but whether from fright, or concern for Mr Randulph, I'm sure I can't say."

"You were present, Jacob, when my son rescued her from the libertine, Villiers—were you not?" asked Mrs. Crew.

"I was, ma'am," replied Jacob; "and I never saw a more sperited young gen'l'man i' my life. I should like to see him, and thank him for the pinkin' he has given that beau."

"It cannot be at present, Jacob," replied Mrs. Crew. "He is ordered to be kept perfectly quiet; and even I am not allowed to remain in his room."

"There's no danger, ma'am, I hope?" asked Jacob, with real concern.

"None whatever, if he's not excited," returned Mrs. Crew.

"I'm glad to hear it," said Jacob, brightening up; "and Miss Hilda'll be glad to hear it, too. She'd never ha' got over it, if anything had happened to him on her account."

"Is she then so much interested in him?" asked Mrs. Crew.

"Why, you see, ma'am," said Jacob, rather puzzled, and gazing from the questioner to Abel, who eyed him very curiously, "it's nat'rel she should be interested in a gen'l'man as has rendered her such important services as Mr. Randulph has done."

"Quite natural," replied Mrs. Crew. "But I wish to ask you a plain question, Jacob: Is, or is not, Miss Hilda kindly affected toward my son?"

"Then I'll answer the quest ionas plainly as it's asked, ma'am," replied Jacob—"she is."

Mrs. Crew glanced at her brother, and Jacob took his cue from the glance.

"I hope the two may come together, ma'am," he said, "I'm sure they're cut out for each other."

"I can't help thinking so, from all I hear of Hilda," said Mrs. Crew.

"It is idle to speculate upon what can never take place," said Abel, sternly. "Go and get something to eat, Jacob, and tell your young lady that Mr. Randulph will be quite himself in a few days—that he is going on as well as possible—that there is no sort of danger."

"In other words, that there's no occasion to send to inquire after him again—eh, sir?" said Jacob.

"Exactly," replied Abel. "Good day, Jacob—good day."

"I don't like him half so well as I did before," thought Jacob, as he left the room, and marched off to the butler's pantry, to Mr. Jukes, who placed bread and cold meat, together with a jug of stout ale, before him.

"Here's Mr. Randulph's speedy recovery," cried Jacob.

"I pledge you in that toast," said Mr. Jukes, filling himself a glass, and draining it.

Soon after the porter's departure, Abel quitted his sister with the intention of going forth on business.

While she was pondering on what had passed between them, the door was opened by Mr. Jukes, who told her that a gentleman had called to see her, and the next moment he ushered in Cordwell Firebras.

CHAPTER III

DETAILING THE INTERVIEW BETWEEN CORDWELL FIREBRAS AND MRS. CREW.

Mrs. Crew, though a good deal surprised and startled, maintained her composure sufficiently well not to attract the notice of the butler, who, having placed a chair for the visitor, quitted the room.

"I have called to inquire after your son, madam," commenced Firebras. "I was present at the affair yesterday, and can confirm what you have no doubt heard from your brother, that he conducted himself admirably throughout it."

"My son, I am happy in being able to state, is rapidly recovering," replied Mrs. Crew; "and having satisfied you on this point, sir, I must entreat you to abridge your visit as much as possible. I would not on any account that my brother Abel should find you here."

"There is no fear of that, madam," replied Firebras; "I watched him go forth, before I ventured to make my call. But time is precious, and I will come to the object of my visit at once. I wrote to you to tell you how much captivated your son was with Mr. Scarve's fair daughter, Hilda. A slight act of imprudence on his part for some time alienated the young lady's regard; but he set himself right with her at Ranelagh, and at Vauxhall made rapid progress in her affections. I was present when the result of the duel was communicated to her yesterday, and if I had entertained any previous doubt as to the extent of Randulph's hold upon her heart, her conduct then would have removed it. She was taken fainting from the room."

"Poor girl!" exclaimed Mrs. Crew—"I am sorry for her."

"Why sorry?" rejoined Firebras; "Randulph will make her an excellent husband."

"But they will never be united," said Mrs. Crew, sighing deeply.

"It will be his own fault if they are not," observed Firebras, drily.

"How so?" cried Mrs. Crew; "both his uncle and her father are against the match."

"That I well know," replied Firebras; "but both may be brought to assent to it."

"You are trifling with me," said the lady.

"I thought you had known me better, Mrs. Crew, than to suppose me capable of trifling on a serious subject," rejoined Firebras, almost sternly. "I can make good my words. Of Mr. Scarve's consent, I am sure."

"He must have altered his mind then, completely," said Mrs. Crew; "for I have been told he intended her for his nephew, and forbade Randulph his house."

"He *will* consent, if I require it," said Firebras, significantly.

"You amaze me," exclaimed Mrs. Crew. "My brother, however, has, within these few minutes, refused to give his consent, and Randulph cannot marry without it."

"Why cannot he?" replied Firebras, smiling. "It is not always necessary to ask an uncle's consent in these cases. Still, as Randulph has considerable expectations from your brother, it would be better not to offend him. I do not despair of winning him over."

"You will accomplish a miracle if you do so," said Mrs. Crew.

"And I *will* accomplish it, and more, provided Randulph joins our party," replied Firebras.

"He refused your former overtures, did he not?" asked Mrs. Crew.

"He did," replied Firebras; "but I should have succeeded with him, if it had not been for the interference of your brother Abel."

"I am rejoiced to hear it," cried Mrs. Crew.

"How!" exclaimed Firebras, "are you no longer faithful to our cause?"

"As faithful as ever," replied Mrs Crew, "but I would rather my son died than forfeit his honour—and he must forfeit it, if he joins us in any other way than on conviction."

"Pshaw! it is not necessary to look at the matter so nicely," replied Firebras, contemptuously. "We must make proselytes the best way we can. Randulph will be very useful to us on the approaching outbreak, and I am therefore anxious to secure him. He is precisely the person I want to attend upon the prince—and have him I will."

"You are very peremptory, sir," said Mrs. Crew.

"You accused me of trifling with you just now, madam," pursued Firebras, "but I will show you I am in earnest. Your son's whole destiny is in my hands; and it depends altogether on me whether his future course is brilliant, successful, and happy, or the reverse. Not only can I wed him to the object of his affections—not only can I procure him a handsome dower from her father—not only can I secure the consent of his uncle,—but I can restore to him the estates which he has given up to his father's creditors, and place him in the position he is entitled to occupy. All this I can, and will do."

"Provided he joins you?" said Mrs. Crew.

"Of course," replied Firebras—"Of course."

"Then I fear he will remain in his present condition," sighed Mrs. Crew.

"Let us look at the other side of the case," pursued Firebras, sternly. "This is not a matter on which to be scrupulous, and I am determined to carry my point. If Randulph refuses to join me, he loses Hilda—loses her dower—loses his uncle's fortune—and his own. Without me Mr. Scarve will never give him his daughter; and without me he will never recover his property. Now, mark me, madam, for I know your son better than you do. He is a fine-spirited young man, and endowed with excellent qualities; but he has essentially the habits and feelings of a gentleman, and your brother Trussell has taken care to inoculate him with his own tastes and propensities. He will never be content with the quiet life he has hitherto led; but, tormented by his love for Hilda, and the sense of what he has lost, will be driven to some desperate course."

"He may yet marry her, though without her father's consent," said Mrs. Crew.

"And marry to beggary," rejoined Firebras, with a bitter laugh. "I do not wish to hold out threats—and what I say is said only to show my power. He never shall marry Hilda Scarve, nor shall he ever enjoy his own again, unless he joins the Jacobite cause. I can prevent both, and I *will* prevent them. His decision must be made quickly, *for he is wanted*. Within a month from this time he must be mine, or all will be lost to him. As a prudent and affectionate mother—as a well-wisher to our cause—I look to you, madam, to use all your influence with him to produce this result."

"I cannot—I cannot!" she rejoined.

"Then you destroy him," said Firebras.

"Oh, put it not thus," she rejoined. "You were an old friend of his father's, and received much kindness, and, unless I mistake, pecuniary assistance from him. Do not act thus cruelly towards the son of your old friend!"

"Cruelly!" exclaimed Firebras, laughing derisively. "I offer him a fortune and the lady of his love, and you call it cruelty—ha! ha!"

"But at the price of his honour," said Mrs. Crew.

"His honour! bah!" exclaimed Firebras, contemptuously. "What is to stain his honour in quitting the cause of a miserable usurper to join that of the rightful claimant of the throne? If you persist in such a notion, I shall begin to doubt the constancy of your own opinions."

"I should be glad if Randulph would voluntarily embrace our cause," said Mrs. Crew; "but I would disown him if he were base enough to be *bought*."

"Well, I have placed both views of the case fairly before you," said Firebras, rising—"weigh over what I have said, and decide."

And as he turned to depart, he encountered Abel Beechcroft, who had entered the room unobserved.

"So!" he exclaimed, without losing his composure, "we have had a listener here, eh? You have heard what has passed between us, Mr. Beechcroft?"

"Some part of it," replied Abel; "and I applaud my sister's conduct as much as I condemn yours. You have stated that you can compel me to give my consent to my nephew's marriage with Hilda Scarve. Be pleased to prove the assertion, sir."

"You have me at a disadvantage, Mr. Beechcroft, because I have not had time to put my plan in operation," replied Firebras; "nevertheless, if I can prove to you that I can recover your nephew's property—and that I will only do so on the condition of your giving your unqualified consent to his union with the young lady in question, you will not refuse it?"

"Coupled as it is with the other condition you have annexed to it, I should deem it my duty to do so," rejoined Abel. "But you must excuse me if I say that I distrust your power of getting back my nephew's property."

"I shall not make the rejoinder which I should do to one of less pacific disposition than yourself, Mr. Beechcroft," replied Firebras, sternly. "But you have doubted my word unjustly. I *can* if I choose, get back Randulph Crew's property."

"Are you one of his father's creditors?" demanded Abel.

"It matters not what I am," returned Firebras. "It must suffice that I can make good my assertion."

"If you are not a creditor," rejoined Abel, "I can obtain the property for him as readily myself."

"You are welcome to make the experiment," said Firebras, with a slight laugh of defiance. "Mrs. Crew, I have the honour to wish you a good morning. Though my plans have been somewhat precipitated by your worthy brother, I still am not without hopes that he will come into them; and at all events, his presence at the interview will save you the necessity of explanation. Your son, I trust, will speedily be master of his property, the husband of Hilda, and——"

"A Jacobite," supplied Abel.

"Precisely," said Firebras, laughing. "Good morning, Mr. Beechcroft." And turning from Abel, he left the room.

"That is a daring and a dangerous man," said Abel to his sister.

"A highly dangerous man," she replied; "and Randulph must be preserved from him."

"He must," replied Abel. "I shall make it my immediate business to ascertain how far there is a probability of his being correct in his statement about the property. It was fortunate that I chanced to come back. Jukes told me there was some one with you, and from his description of the person, I felt sure who it must be. Let us go into the garden, and talk the matter over farther."

CHAPTER IV.

TREATS OF THE MISER'S ILLNESS;—AND OF THE DISCOVERY OF THE MYSTERIOUS PACKET BY HILDA.

Hilda Scarve had soon a new cause of anxiety. Not only was she uneasy about Randulph, whose recovery was not quite so rapid as had been anticipated, but her father's state of health began to occasion her considerable alarm. While walking out, he got caught in the rain; and on his return home, though drenched to the skin, refused to change his clothes. A low fever was the consequence; and holding apothecary's stuff, as he termed physic, in abhorrence, he would take nothing to carry it off. Owing to this neglect, that which was a slight matter in the commencement, ended in becoming a serious illness.

One day, in spite of his daughter's entreaties, he would go forth; and, after being absent a few hours, during which, as it appeared, he had walked to a considerable distance, he returned in such a state of exhaustion, that Hilda was quite terrified. All, however, she could prevail upon him to take was a small basin of weak water-gruel, but without even a teaspoonful of wine or brandy in it. Next morning he was considerably better, and

Hilda thought the crisis past; but she was mistaken, and so was her father; for, fancying that the exercise of the previous day had done him good, he went out again, walked further than before, got caught a second time in the rain, and fearfully increased the fever.

On this occasion, he was persuaded to take off his wet clothes, and go to bed, and even to have a small fire lighted in his chamber, where none had ever before been lighted in his time. Watching this operation with the utmost anxiety, he called to Jacob, who was laying the fire, not to waste the wood, though only three or four small chips were used; next, blamed him for putting on too much coal; and, lastly, forbade him to light it. Jacob, however, ventured to disobey his orders, and having applied a match to some bits of paper stuck in the bars, quitted the room. As soon as he was gone, the miser instantly sprang out of bed, and without much difficulty extinguished the only partially-kindled fire.

Shortly afterwards, Hilda came into the room, and finding what had happened, besought him to let the fire be lighted, and at last wrung from him a most reluctant assent. But again another accident occurred. More paper was lighted, the wood caught, and began to crackle in the bars. The chimney, however, smoked, and Jacob peeping up it to ascertain the cause, perceived that it was stopped by a wisp of straw. He immediately thrust up his arm, pulled down the obstacle, and in so doing, dislodged two heavy bags, which fell into the fire with a rattling noise, proclaiming the nature of their contents.

At this sound, the miser, who had been sinking into a slumber, instantly sprang up, and uttering a wild cry, ordered both his daughter and Jacob out of the room. They knew him too well to disobey, and as soon as they were gone, he got out of bed again, plucked the bags from the fire, which luckily had not burnt the sacking, and, locking them carefully up in a strong box, placed the key under his pillow.

But the idea of the discovery of his hoard haunted him, and, combined with the fever, prevented the possibility of slumber. He tried to recollect the different places where he had hidden money, and, unable to call them all to mind, grew almost distracted. Hilda begged to be allowed to sit up with him, but he would not allow her; neither would he permit Jacob to do so. Waiting till he thought all were asleep, he then rose, and wrapping himself in his dressing-gown, proceeded to examine several nooks and crannies in the room, in which he had placed small sums of money.

All his hoards were safe, except one. He had put ten guineas in a glove about two months before, and fancied he had hidden it behind a shutter. But it was not there, and convinced that Jacob had discovered it, and purloined it, he was about to descend and tax him with the robbery, when he all at once recollected having placed the glove under a broken plank near the hearthstone. He immediately took up the board, and there, sure enough, was the lost treasure.

Made easy by this discovery, he restored the glove to its place, and returned to bed. Still, he could not rest. An idea took possession of him, that the money he had buried in the cellar was gone, and unable to shake off the notion, he arose, and habiting himself as before, took the rushlight that burnt by his bedside, and with trembling but cautious steps, went down stairs.

Arrived at the cellar, he set down the rushlight, and cast an almost piteous look at the cask, beneath which he had buried his gold, as if seeking to know whether it was still there. At last he summoned up resolution for the task, and repairing to the coal-hole, possessed himself of the shovel, and commenced digging up the box.

Anxiety supplied him with strength, and in less than half an hour, he had got out the box, opened it, and counted the money bags, which he found all right. He would have counted the gold within them as well, but neither his strength nor time would allow him to do so.

While thus employed he formed a terrible representation of the effect that avarice may produce upon the mind. There he worked, burning with fever in a damp cellar, half naked, for he had taken off his dressing-gown to enable him to ply the spade with greater freedom;—there he worked, as if life and death were in his efforts, and almost looked, such was his ghastly appearance, like a corpse digging his own grave.

It was a fearful sight to see, and it was witnessed by one upon whom it made a lasting and forcible impression. This was his daughter. Hearing him go down stairs, she had followed him, and saw what he was about, but did not dare to interrupt him, apprehensive of the consequences. At last, when he had got out the box, and examined its contents, she hoped all was over, and, proceeding to Jacob's room, roused him, and telling him what had happened, bade him watch his master, and then retired to her own chamber.

Jacob obeyed, and having seen the former occurrence, was at no loss to comprehend what was now happening. He, accordingly, stationed himself at the door, and saw through the chink, for it was left ajar, that the miser was filling up the hole, and restoring the place to its former appearance.

It was wonderful, and almost incredible, to see how that feeble old man, shaken by sickness, and tottering on the verge of the grave, toiled—how he persevered—how he took the earth out of the cask—how he filled up the hole—how he restored the bricks to their places—how he trod them down with his naked feet.

Jacob was amazed, and almost felt as if he was in a dream. But he was suddenly roused to full consciousness as the miser, having finished his task, leaned upon his spade to rest himself, but being completely overcome, uttered a deep groan, and fell with his face upon the ground.

Instantly rushing towards him, Jacob found him senseless, and at first thought him dead, but perceiving some symptoms of animation about him, he lifted him up in his arms as easily as if he had been a child, and carried him up stairs to bed. He then informed Hilda what had happened, and she hastened to apply such restoratives as she possessed, and which, ere long, to her infinite satisfaction, brought him back to consciousness. But he was not himself for some hours, and rambled incessantly about his treasure, which he imagined had been taken from him. Nature, however, at length asserted her sway, and he dropped asleep. During his slumbers, Jacob brought the chest up stairs with the money-bags in it, and placed it at the foot of his bed.

The miser did not wake till late in the following morning, and he was then very faint and light-headed. He swallowed a basin of strong broth, prepared for him by his daughter, with great greediness, for he was as much exhausted by want of food as from any other cause, and in the course of a few hours gained strength considerably.

As he got better, his head cleared, and he began to recollect something of the events of the previous night. At first, he thought he must have dreamt of digging up his treasure; but by degrees becoming satisfied that he had really done so, he grew exceedingly uneasy, and desired to know how he had been put to bed. Hilda then told him, and showed him where the chest was placed, assuring him all was safe. Still he was not wholly satisfied, and later in the day determined, in spite of all dissuasions to the contrary, to get up.

Left to himself, he locked the door, and examined the bags, which were all tied in a peculiar manner, and sealed, and their appearance satisfied him that they had not been opened. He had not been long up, when he felt so dreadfully ill, that, for the first time in his life, he began to think his end approaching. Falling back in his chair, he shook as with an ague, while cold perspiration burst from every pore. The fit, however, passed off, and he made an effort to crawl to the door, and call Jacob. The latter instantly answered the summons, and looked so unmistakeably alarmed at his master's appearance, that the other could not but notice it.

"You think me very ill, Jacob?" said the miser "Don't be afraid of frightening me,—speak the truth,—I know you do."

"Why, yes," rejoined Jacob; "you don't look well, certainly. If I was you, and I'd any affairs to arrange, I'd settle 'em quickly, for fear of accident,—that's all."

"I understand," replied the miser, with a ghastly grin; "but I'm not going to die just yet, Jacob, — not just yet, — don't think it."

"I'm sure I hope not," replied Jacob; "for though we haven't agreed over and above well of late, I should be sorry to lose you."

The miser turned away, and crept back to his chair, sinking into it exhausted by the effort he had made.

"I want you to go to Gray's Inn, Jacob," he said, at length, "to tell Mr. Diggs to come to me."

"What, to make your will?" rejoined Jacob. "Well, I think you're right there. No harm in bein' on the safe side."

"Never mind what I want him for," rejoined the miser; "do as I bid you."

"I wish you'd let me bring some other 'turney i'stead o' that smooth-faced, palaverin' Diggs," said Jacob. "A will's a serious affair, and I should be sorry you did an injustice that can't be repaired."

"Don't argue with me, rascal, but begone!" cried the miser.

"I don't like fetchin' Diggs," said Jacob. "Couldn't I make a will for you? A few words would do it—'I leave all my property and possessions, whatsoever and wheresomedever, to my lawfully-begotten daughter, Hilda Scarve.' That'll be quite enough, and far better than any will Mr. Diggs'll make for you. Besides, it'll cost you nothin'."

"This fellow will kill me!" groaned the miser. "Do go, Jacob!" he added, imploringly.

"Well, I can't resist that," said Jacob; "but as you hope to be forgiven hereafter, don't act unjustly by your daughter."

"If you continue faithful to me to the last, I'll leave you a handsome legacy, Jacob," said the miser; "a handsome legacy, —but not a farthing, if you disobey me."

"I don't want a legacy," replied Jacob. "I'd rather not have it. But don't you forget your wife's sister, poor Mrs. Clinton. You've used her hardly this many a year. Make it up to her now."

"I must look ill, indeed!" groaned the miser, "since the rascal dares to talk to me thus. "Will you go or not?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, I'll go," said Jacob. "Shall I send your daughter to you?"

And receiving a faint reply in the affirmative, he quitted the room.

About an hour after this, he returned with Diggs, who was closeted with the miser for a long time. Jacob knew that some writing must be going forward, for he was ordered to take pen and ink up stairs; and he would fain have played the spy, but he could not do so without being detected. At length, he was summoned by Diggs, who desired him to call a coach. He was not long in meeting with one; and on informing the attorney that it was ready for him, he was almost struck dumb with astonishment, by an order from the latter to take down the chest containing the money-bags, and place it in the vehicle.

"Why, you don't mean to send that chest away?" he said to his master.

"Yes, that chest—that identical chest, my good fellow," said the attorney.

"But I must have the order from master's own lips, or I wont obey it," said Jacob, doggedly.

"Will you be pleased, sir, to tell your servant what he is to do?" said Diggs, impatiently.

"Take away the chest," replied the miser.

"What this with the money in it,—this here?" asked Jacob, giving it a sounding knock.

"Ay," rejoined the miser.

"Well, if I must, I must," said Jacob, shouldering the chest; "but it would have been safer i' the cellar than where it's a-goin' to."

He had scarcely placed his burden in the coach, when Diggs followed him, and jumping into the vehicle, ordered him, with a triumphant glance, to shut the door, and bid the coachman drive to his chambers.

"Gray's Inn, coachee!" cried Jacob, as he complied; "and may you break your fare's neck as you go," he added, in a lower tone.

His mind lightened, apparently, by what had taken place, Mr. Scarve remained perfectly quiet during the rest of the day, and retired early to rest; but he passed another sleepless night, and was seized with a new panic about his money. The next day, finding himself unable to go down stairs, he ordered Jacob to bring up all his boxes, and to place them near him. His fever increasing, and assuming somewhat the character of an ague, he consented to have a small fire kept up constantly in his bed-room, and set his chair close beside it. In addition to his dressing-gown, he wrapped an old blanket over his shoulders, and tried to keep his lower limbs warm by clothing them in a couple of pair of worsted hose. His bed being totally destitute of hangings, he had a sheet hung up against the lower end of it to keep off the blaze of the fire, which he fancied disturbed him during the night. These slight comforts were all he permitted himself, and he remained as inflexible as ever on the score of medicine, and medical advice.

"A doctor can do no good," he said to Jacob, who urged him to send for one: "if abstinence wont cure a man, no physic will."

"Well, perhaps you're right, sir," said Jacob; "but I wish you'd think less o' your worldly affairs, and more o' your sperretual ones. Look at that pictur' over your chimney-piece, and see how

Death is takin' away the covetous man's treasures before his very eyes. It might be intended as a warnin' to you."

The picture alluded to by Jacob, was a copy of one of Holbein's designs of the Dance of Death, suspended over the chimney-piece, and with the scriptural motto underneath it—" *Stulte, hac nocte repetunt animam tuam: et quæ parasti cujus erunt ?*"—did seem to have a fearful and solemn application to the present conjuncture. The miser shuddered as he looked at it, but he would not acknowledge the justice of the porter's remark.

Of late, he had begun to entertain a dislike to Jacob, and would scarcely suffer him to come near him. Having seen him, when opening one of the boxes, take up an old stocking-foot in which a few pieces of silver were tied, he took it into his head that he designed to rob him; and his fears being magnified by his perturbed imagination, he soon persuaded himself that he also intended to murder him. To prevent any such design, he placed a loaded pistol on the chimney-piece near him, and hung a drawn sword on a peg, so as to be within reach in case of need. These weapons he carried with him to his bed-side at night.

But he grew daily worse and worse, and his faculties became more and more enfeebled. He rambled about the house at night, almost in a state of somnambulism, muttering strange things about his treasure, and frequently visiting the cellar where he had buried the chest, unconscious that it was gone.

At such times, Jacob constantly followed, to prevent him from doing himself a mischief, but took care not to be seen. His groans and lamentations were pitiful to hear, for he had begun to fancy himself a ruined man, and not even the sight of his money could assure him to the contrary.

It was vain to reason with him. The distressing idea was too strongly impressed upon his mind to be removed.

His next whim was to have his boxes opened by Hilda, to whom he had entrusted his keys, and he insisted upon certain deeds and papers being read to him, the meaning of which he only very imperfectly comprehended.

One night, when seated by the fireside wrapped in his blanket, and with his feet on a straw hassock, he desired his daughter to read him some more papers. The fire burnt as cheerily as it could in the starveling grate, and Hilda insisting upon having two candles to read by, there was more light than usual. Having got through several mortgages, leases, and bonds, to the innumerable clauses of which he listened in his usual apathetic manner, he suddenly turned round to her, and pointing to the strong box which formerly stood under his table in the room down stairs, signed to her to open it.

Well aware that this box contained his most private papers, Hilda had hitherto avoided meddling with it, but thus enjoined, she no longer hesitated. Placing it on the table, therefore, she took the large bunch of keys, and soon finding the right unlocked it.

"Is there anything in particular you wish me to read, de father?" she said, taking out some papers tied together with re tape. "Here is a bond for two thousand pounds from George Delahay Villiers, Esquire; another from Lady Brabazon; and another from Sir Bulkeley Price. Shall I read any of them?"

The miser shook his head.

"Here are several bills," she continued, taking up a roll of smaller papers—"and another bundle of mortgages, will you hear any of them?"

The miser shook his head. The movement was almost mechanical with him.

"Then I will go on," pursued Hilda. "Ah! what is this letter with the black seal! Shall I read it?"

The miser made no reply. He was gazing listlessly into the fire, and watching the wreaths of smoke ascend the chimney with childish delight.

Hilda, therefore, opened the letter, and found a small memorandum enclosed in it, which she placed upon the table. Trembling with emotion, she then began to read aloud the following lines:—

"Old and valued Friend,—If this should ever meet your eye, I shall have been a year in my grave, for in accordance with our agreement, it will not be delivered to you until the expiration of that time after my death. The agreement, I need not remind you, was so formed, that in case we should both die within the year, the contract entered into by us respecting the marriage of our children should be null and void."

Here Hilda was startled by a sharp cry from her father, and looking up, she saw that he was staring wildly and inquiringly at her.

"What are you reading?" he asked.

"The letter delivered to you by Randulph Crew," she replied; —"the letter from his father."

"And what business have you to read it?" he cried. "Who gave you leave to do so?"

"Having gone so far, I shall go on," rejoined Hilda; and she resumed her reading:—"'I now call upon you to fulfil your share of the contract, and to give your daughter to my son. When we entered into the engagement, I was supposed to be the richer of the two; but I am now sadly reduced, and if my son fulfils his word, and gives up the estates to pay my creditors, he will have little or nothing.'"

"He has nothing—he has nothing!" cried the miser, "I will never give my consent—never!"

"'But under whatever circumstances he may be placed,'" said Hilda, continuing the letter, "'whether he gives up the property or not, I call upon you to fulfil your part of the contract, as I would have fulfilled mine, whatever might have happened to you; and to make, as you have agreed to do, a settlement upon your daughter proportioned to your means.' "

"I made no such agreement!" cried the miser; "it is false—false!"

"'I enclose a copy of the memorandum,'" pursued Hilda, still reading, "'the original, as you know, is in the possession of Cordwell Firebras. He will see it executed. God so requite you, as you shall fulfil your agreement or neglect it!—RANDULPH CREW.' And here is the memorandum," she added, taking up the smaller piece of paper,—"It is signed by Randulph Crew and John Scarve.

"It is a forgery!" shrieked the miser.

"The original is in the possession of Cordwell Firebras," said Hilda. "Father, you have dealt unjustly by Randulph Crew. You owe him a great reparation, and I trust you will make it."

"I owe him nothing," replied the miser; "it is all a fabrication. Give me the papers, that I may burn them! Give them to me directly."

And getting up, he staggered towards her, and snatched the letter and memorandum from her, with the intention of throwing them into the fire. But before he could do so, the door opened, and admitted Abel Beechcroft.

"What do you want, sir?" cried the miser, regarding him fearfully, and letting the papers which he had crushed in his grasp drop upon the floor.

"I have heard of your illness, Mr. Scarve," replied Abel; "and am come to say a few words to you that must be said while you are able to hear them."

"But you disturb me," rejoined the miser—"you can have nothing to say to me."

"I have something to forgive," returned Abel.

"To forgive!" echoed Scarve, vacantly. "How have I injured you? Ah! now I recollect! I married Arabella Clinton, whom you would willingly have wedded. But she has been dead and gone these seventeen years, and more."

"My father is not sufficiently himself to converse with you, Mr. Beechcroft," said Hilda; "but there is one thing I would mention——"

"Not a word about the letter, or the contract!" cried the miser, with sudden fury; "not a word, or I will launch my curse against you—a father's curse—beware how you incur it!"

"What is this?" cried Abel Beechcroft, in astonishment.

"Nothing," cried the miser—"it is a matter between me and my daughter. Get you gone. You have no business here. I can die without your forgiveness."

"Father!" exclaimed Hilda, "I have a duty to others as well as to you. Another opportunity may not occur. I must tell Mr. Beechcroft what I have discovered.'

The miser shook his hands at her in impotent fury, and attempted to pronounce the curse; but his utterance failed him, and with a half-articulate cry, he fell senseless to the ground.

Hilda's cries instantly brought Jacob to the room, and the miser was laid upon the bed, where restoratives were successfully employed. Inexpressibly shocked and alarmed by what he had witnessed, Abel Beechcroft took his leave, and Hilda having picked up the letter and memorandum, and carefully straightened them, put them both into a place of security.

CHAPTER V.

ABEL'S CONDUCT ON LEARNING THE MISER'S ILLNESS — SIR SINGLETON SPINKE PROPOSES TO THE FAIR THOMASINE — RANDULPH AGAIN DINES WITH LADY BRABAZON—HE RECEIVES A NOTE FROM KITTY CONWAY, AND IS ASSAULTED BY PHILIP FREWIN AND HIS MYRMIDONS ON HIS WAY TO SUP WITH HER.

ACCOUNTS of Mr. Scarve's state of health had been conveyed to Mrs. Crew by Jacob, who unhesitatingly expressed his conviction that the attack would terminate fatally.

"He may linger for some time," said Jacob; "but I'm certain he'll never be himself again."

This intelligence produced a visible effect on Abel, and Mrs. Crew thought she could discover less asperity in his feelings towards his old enemy. He desired Jacob to inform him daily how his master went on, and to be sure and let him know instantly if any material change for the worse took place.

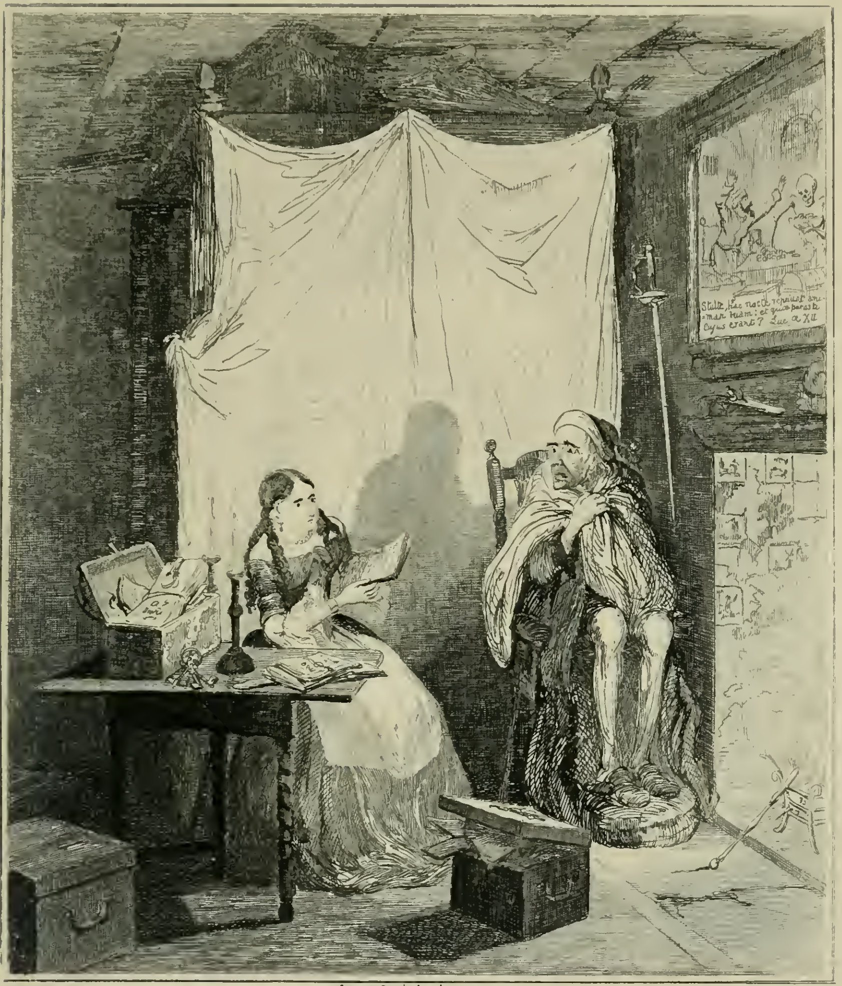
"I suppose there is nothing I can do for him," he added —"nothing I can send him."

"Why, he wont take any physic if he knows it," said Jacob; "and as to wine or brandy, there isn't a drop in the house, and hasn't been these four or five days. And we can't send to buy any, for he only gives Miss Hilda the trifle he used to allow for house expenses, and she doesn't like to take any of his money, for fear of angerin' him, for he counts it every day, and would be sure to miss it."

"Take a bottle of wine and another of brandy back with you, Jacob," said Abel.

"Thankee, sir—thankee!" rejoined Jacob; "it may be the means o' savin' his life. I'll mix a spoonful with his gruel, and I dare say he'll never find it out."

"Is there anything else I can send him?" asked Abel. "My housekeeper would make him broths or jellies. We have more convenience here than you can have."


Stulte, hac nocte repetunt ani-
=mam tuam: et quæ parasti
cujus erunt? Luc. c. XII

George Cruikshank

The discovery of the mysterious packet

"And more means as well," replied Jacob; "I wont say no, for we really are hardly put to it to treat him as he should be treated. And only think of him, rollin' in wealth, and yet denyin himself the common comforts of existence—the necessaries, I may say, at a time like this. And then to be indebted to you for 'em, sir—you—of all people in the world."

"Take care he never knows it, nor even suspects it," said Abel, hastily.

"Never fear, sir," replied Jacob; "he shall learn nothin' from me. But he'll never ask."

"I suppose I cannot be of any assistance to your young lady, Jacob?" said Mrs. Crew.

"I fear not, ma'am," replied Jacob. "My poor young missis has a hard task to go through, but she must fulfil it. And brighter days, I hope, are in store for her."

Abel then rang the bell, and gave instructions to Mr. Jukes, who, taking Jacob to his pantry, brought the wine and brandy his master had ordered, and filled a can with mutton broth for him.

"You shall have some nice chicken broth to-morrow," said the butler; "and in the meantime, this will be better than nothing."

"I should think so," replied Jacob.

During the few minutes which it had taken the butler to go to the cellar, Jacob had found time to dig deep into a steak pie, and to empty a quart mug of ale; but he now started up, put the brandy into one capacious pocket, and the wine into the other, and taking up the can of broth, set off at his quickest pace to the Little Sanctuary.

He came daily for a fresh supply of broth, which he said, and with perfect truth, was the main support of his master. Abel always saw him for a few minutes when he came, and listened with the greatest interest to his accounts of the miser's proceedings. Jacob told him of Diggs's visit, and of his suspicion that he had made his will; and concluded by mentioning the sum of money which the attorney had carried away.

This account perplexed and troubled Abel exceedingly, and he muttered—"I must make some inquiries about Diggs, and try to find out what he does with the money. I hope this wretched old man has not put the crowning act to his folly, and left his property away from his daughter."

"God forbid!" exclaimed Jacob. "But there's no sayin' what he may do. I wish you would see him, sir."

"I would see him if I thought it would do any good," replied Abel; "but I apprehend my interference would only be productive of harm. I must see him before all is over. We have an account to settle together."

"Then you'd better not put it off too long," replied Jacob.

Abel, however, could not muster up resolution for the painful scene which he expected to encounter; until one evening—as he was sitting after dinner over his wine, with his sister, Randulph, and Trussell—Jacob, who had been there before in the morning, came to inform him that the miser had been so unwell all day, and so fanciful and light-headed, that if he wished to have any communication with him while he was in his right mind, he had better not postpone his visit. Abel then decided upon going at once, and accordingly proceeded with Jacob to the Little Sanctuary, where he had the short and painful interview with the miser, detailed in the preceding chapter.

By this time Randulph was able to go abroad. One of his earliest visits was to Sir Norfolk Salusbury, who was delighted to see him, and shook him cordially by the hand, repeating what he had previously stated, that he thought he had conducted himself admirably in the affair of the duel. Sir Norfolk then began to talk of the miser's illness, and deplored the position of his daughter, adding that he had been several times to call upon him, but had always been denied admittance. While they were thus conversing, Sir Bulkeley Price was announced. Like Sir Norfolk, he appeared greatly pleased to see Randulph abroad again, and offered his congratulations.

"Villiers was out before you, Mr. Crew," he said; "I had a visit from him yesterday; but he still wears his arm in a sling, probably because he thinks it becoming. He came to entreat me to offer his apologies to Miss Scarve, and to express his compunction for his conduct. He was incited to it, he declares, by the violence of his passion for her; but he is now entirely cured, and is heartily ashamed of his conduct."

"He said as much to me," added Sir Norfolk.

"He also expressed himself most handsomely about you, Mr. Crew," pursued Sir Bulkeley; "and said he was extremely glad the duel had terminated in the way it did. I hope, therefore, you will be better friends than ever."

"We may be better friends, because we shall probably see less of each other," said Randulph, laughing. "However, it is pleasant to have such flattering things said of one by an adversary."

Shortly afterwards, the party left Abingdon-street, and proceeded to the Mall in Saint James's-park, where they met Beau Villiers, Lady Brabazon, and Clementina, together with their constant attendant, Sir Singleton Spinke. Villiers, whose right arm was sustained by a scarf, immediately held forth his disengaged hand to Randulph, and passed so many encomiums upon his courage and address, that the latter must have been made of stubborn material indeed to be insensible to them. His generous nature was sensibly touched, and he began to think he had done the beau an injustice. Lady Brabazon, too, exerted her utmost witchery, and told him, with a captivating smile, "that if he consulted his good looks, he would fight a duel and get wounded once a month, as he now looked handsomer than ever.

The interview ended in Randulph accepting an invitation to dine the next day with Lady Brabazon. Trussell was enchanted. Accident, and a combination of circumstances, had accomplished precisely what he desired. As to Randulph, he was annoyed with himself for having made the engagement; but it was now too late to retract. He felt somewhat embarrassed as to how to communicate the matter to his mother; but Trussell relieved him of the difficulty, and, on their return home, gave a lively and diverting account of the meeting in the park, and said it had led to a reconciliation dinner, which was to take place at Lady Brabazon's on the following day.

"I hope the dinner may not lead to another quarrel," said Abel.

"I hope so too," replied Mrs. Crew. "I wish you would discontinue your intimacy with Lady Brabazon, Randulph,—I cannot endure her."

"I do not intend to continue it to the same extent as before," said Randulph; "but it was impossible to refuse the present invitation."

"Quite impossible!" echoed Trussell—"never was anything so handsome as Villiers's apologies."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Abel; "they are as little to be trusted as himself."

"I don't think so in the present case," said Randulph.

"You may take my word for it, you are deceived," rejoined Abel. And here the conversation dropped.

The next day, soon after five o'clock, Randulph and his uncle crossed from the Palace Stairs to Westminster, and shaped their course towards the Little Sanctuary. Trussell wished to call for a new peruke which he had ordered from Peter Pokerich; and while he stepped into the little barber's to try it on, Randulph proceeded to the other side of the street to make inquiries after the miser and his daughter.

"He's as bad as he can be," said Jacob, who answered his knock, shaking his head; "and I'm afraid this constant watchin' will be too much for Miss Hilda. I want to have a word with you, but I can't stop just now, for I'm wanted. Where shall you be to-night?"

"I'm going to dine with Lady Brabazon in Pall Mall," replied Randulph. "I shall leave about ten, and will call here on my way home."

"No; I'll step up to her ladyship's at ten," rejoined Jacob; "and I'll wait till you come out. We may have somethin' to do together."

With this, he closed the door, and Randulph walked across the street to Peter Pokerich's. At the same moment, a chair was seen advancing along the street, which stopped at Mr. Deacle's, and being opened, let forth Sir Singleton Spinke, very gaily dressed, who skipped into the mercer's shop. Having witnessed the old beau's entrance, Randulph turned into the barber's and told his uncle what had occurred.

"Sir Singleton must be gone to pay court to the fair Thomasine," said Trussell, laughing.

On hearing this remark, Peter, without saying a word, darted out of the shop, and hurried to the neighbouring house. Trussell was at first disposed to be angry, but on reflecting on the probable cause of the barber's sudden flight, he burst into a loud laugh.

"Let us go and see what happens," he said, arranging his wig.

The little barber, meanwhile, had entered the mercer's shop. There was no one in attendance in front but an apprentice, who did not notice him. He accordingly stepped lightly and quickly towards the door of the inner room, which was left ajar, enabling him to hear what passed within, while the upper half being glazed, and partly covered by a green silk blind, showed him that the speakers were Sir Singleton and his mistress. The old beau was on his knees, while the fair Thomasine had abandoned her hand to him, though she averted her looks from him; owing to which circumstance, she did not discover the jealous eyes of the barber glaring at her through the window. As to Peter, he tugged at his wig with jealous rage, and would have plucked handfuls of hair from it, if it would have yielded; but being stoutly made, it resisted his efforts bravely.

"I will not rise till I have a favourable answer, adorable Thomasine!" said Sir Singleton. "Will you be mine?—will you fly with me?"

"I cannot," replied the fair Thomasine, turning round with such suddenness that the little barber had barely time to duck down to escape observation. "I cannot. I have already told you a hundred times, I am engaged to Peter Pokerich"

"I will cut the little rascal's throat!" cried Sir Singleton, rising, and clapping his hand on his sword. "I will belabour him with his own pole."

"No, don't!" said the fair Thomasine—"I should go distracted, like Ophelia, if any harm were to happen to him. Poor Peter is so very fond of me—so very, very fond! At one time, he was a little inconstant, to be sure—slightly dazzled by the charms of the miser's lovely daughter. But latterly, he has become quite devoted."

"He cannot love you a thousandth part as well as I love you," said the old beau—"it is not in his vulgar nature. Besides, I can make you Lady Spinke—can put you at the head of a splendid establishment—cover you with diamonds—introduce you to the first society—take you every night to some fine lady's drum—to Ranelagh—to Vauxhall—to the playhouses."

"It sounds delightful, indeed!" said the fair Thomasine, whose eyes sparkled at the beau's enumeration of the pleasures he had in store for her. "But will you really make me Lady Spinke?"

"I swear it!" cried the old beau. "Oh! you are mine!—say you are mine!"

"No, you're too old for me!" said the fair Thomasine. "I don't think I could marry you."

The unhappy barber, who had almost sunk into the floor, here revived again.

"Too old," exclaimed Sir Singleton. "Why, I'm in the very prime of life. But granting that I am old, you'll the sooner be a widow. Lady Spinke, with a large jointure—think of that!"

"A large jointure is very tempting, certainly," said the fair Thomasine, musingly.

"You can't hesitate, I am sure, my charmer," cried the old beau, "between the brilliant life I hold out to you, and the wretched one you will be condemned to with your little barber. Give him up at once. Leave him to his wigs, his pomatum, his powder-puff, and his blocks, and let him marry some barmaid, or serving-woman, the only creatures fit for him."

"Lady Singleton Spinke and Mrs. Peter Pokerich do sound very differently," said the fair Thomasine. "I should mightily like to be called 'your ladyship.'"

"So would most women, but it isn't every one who has the opportunity," rejoined the old beau.

"But then I must have a fine gilt coach?" pursued the fair Thomasine.

"It is yours," replied Sir Singleton.

"And beautiful dresses?" she continued.

"As many as you like," he answered. "I'll buy your father's whole stock of silks."

"And magnificent diamonds?"

"Equal to a duchess's."

"And I shall go to court?"

"You shall."

"And to Ranelagh, Vauxhall, and the playhouses?"

"As often as you please."

"Well, then, I almost—but oh dear! it would be so wrong—no, I can't consent. 'Twould break my Peter's heart."

"Peter's heart will soon be mended again," replied Sir Singleton. "I'll have a coach and four at the corner of the street at five o'clock to-morrow morning; and then we'll drive a few miles out of town for an airing, and return to breakfast—and to the Fleet, where we'll be married."

"Don't expect me, I never can make up my mind to so fearful a step, said the fair Thomasine, pathetically, yet undecisively

"Well, I shall be there, at all events," said the old beau, pressing her hand to his lips. Farewell. At five."

The little barber had heard enough. He darted off like a madman, and almost upset Trussell and Randulph, who, as well as himself, had overheard what passed. The next moment, the old beau issued forth, singing a French song, and twirling his cane gaily.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, perceiving Trussell and Randulph, "what the deuce brings you here?"

"We came to look after the little barber, who ran away, leaving my wig only half dressed," replied Trussell. "He has just rushed out of this shop as if he had gone distracted."

"The devil!" exclaimed Sir Singleton; "then he has overheard my plan. I must change it."

And stepping back to the fair Thomasine, he whispered, "Peter Pokerich has been playing the spy upon us. He may interfere with our arrangements. To night at twelve, instead of to-morrow morning at five. Till then, ma belle, adieu!" and kissing his hand to her, he rejoined his friends.

"You are both going to Lady Brab's, I suppose?" he said. "Sorry I can't take you—we shall meet again in a few minutes."

So saying, and strutting off triumphantly, he entered his chair, and was conveyed to Lady Brabazon's, where Randulph and his uncle arrived a few minutes after him.

The dinner passed off delightfully. It was a small party, consisting of Sir Bulkeley Price, Sir Norfolk Salusbury, and Lady Fazakerly. Everything was done to please Randulph, and the efforts were perfectly successful. The wine flowed freely after dinner—for it was a hard drinking age—and Randulph, who had been exceedingly temperate since the duel, began to feel the effect of it. As he was about to ascend to the drawing-room with the rest of the gentlemen, a note was handed him by a servant, which he instantly opened.

"What says your billet, nephew?" inquired Trussell, who was standing by.

"Oh! it's from Kitty Conway," said Randulph. "She has found out, I know not how, that I am here, and wishes me to sup with her to-night for the last time."

"And you will go, wont you?" said Trussell.

"Not I," replied Randulph, irresolutely.

"Oh yes, you will," said Trussell; "and I'll accompany you on your last visit, as I did on the first."

And they went up stairs laughingly to the drawing-room.

Time passed by so fleetly in the fascinating society of Lady Brabazon, that Randulph was surprised, on glancing at his watch, to find it nearly eleven o'clock.

"Jacob will be gone," he thought, "and will think I have forgotten him."

Hastily taking leave of Lady Brabazon, who chided him playfully for running away so early, and engaged him to call upon her on the following morning, he went down stairs, accompanied by Trussell. They found Jacob at the door, and in no very bland humour at having been kept so long.

"My time's more than up," said the latter, gruffly, "and I was just goin' away. What I want to say is this,—I've received a hint that master's miserly nevy, Philip Frewin, is about to decamp with the money I gave Mr. Diggs t'other day. He's at the Crown Inn, Ox-yard, King-street. Suppose you pay him a visit."

"I'll readily do so to-morrow, Jacob," said Randulph; "but to-night I'm engaged. Come along with me. My way lies in the same direction as yours, and I want to talk to you about your master and young mistress."

Jacob complied, and accompanied Randulph to the corner of Hedge-lane, a narrow thoroughfare running into Cockspur-street, where he took his leave. Randulph and his uncle then tracked the lane above mentioned, until they came to Whitcomb-street, where Kitty Conway then resided, having removed from the Haymarket to an old house in the latter street, erected three years after the great Fire of London—namely, 1669. Never having visited the pretty actress in her new abode, but having been told in the note that this date, which was inscribed in large figures on a shield over the door, would guide him to it, Randulph was looking out for the house, when he observed three men at a little distance behind him, who seemed to be dogging him and his uncle. The foremost was a tall, thin man; the second a stout, square-set personage, attired in a shabby military garb; and the third a great hulking fellow with an atrociously black muzzle, dressed in a blue jacket, short trousers, and woollen cap.

Randulph could not help fancying he had seen these personages before, though he could not tell where, but he did not concern himself much about them, until just as he had discovered Kitty Conway's dwelling, and was about to knock at the door, he saw that they were quickening their pace towards him. On a nearer approach, he was at no loss to detect Philip Frewin; and in his companions, Captain Culpepper, and the fellow who had officiated as Jack-in-the-water at the Folly on the Thames.

"Here is your man!" shouted Philip, pointing out Randulph to the others; "upon him! don't leave an unbroken bone in his body."

Randulph, however, was prepared for the attack. Grasping the stout cane he held in his hand, he dealt Philip so severe a blow on the head with it that he stretched him on his back on the ground. At the same moment, Trussell received a blow from the cudgel of the athletic sailor, which sent him reeling against the door, to the posts of which he clung for support, while the ruffian turning to assault Randulph, encountered an unexpected adversary in the person of Jacob Post.

"I thought what you were after, you scoundrels, when I saw you doggin' these gen'l'men," cried Jacob; "I'm glad I got up in time. Turn your cudgel this way, you black-muzzled hound! Two can play at your game."

While Jacob and his antagonist rapped away at each other as hard as they could, making the welkin ring with their blows, Randulph turned upon Culpepper, who attempted to draw his sword to assail him, and belaboured him so lustily with his cane, that the latter was soon fain to cry for quarter.

The sound of the cudgels, and the vociferations of the combatants, had alarmed the watch, who sprang their rattles, and hastened to the scene of strife, while Kitty Conway, hearing the noise, opened a window above, and seeing what was passing in the street, added her shrieks to the general clamour.

Before, however, the watch could come up, Jacob had brought his athletic antagonist to the ground, and Culpepper had taken to his heels without being able to strike a single blow.

CHAPTER VI.

BY WHAT DEVICE PHILIP FREWIN GOT OFF; AND HOW RANDULPH AND TRUSSELL WERE LOCKED UP IN THE WATCH-HOUSE.

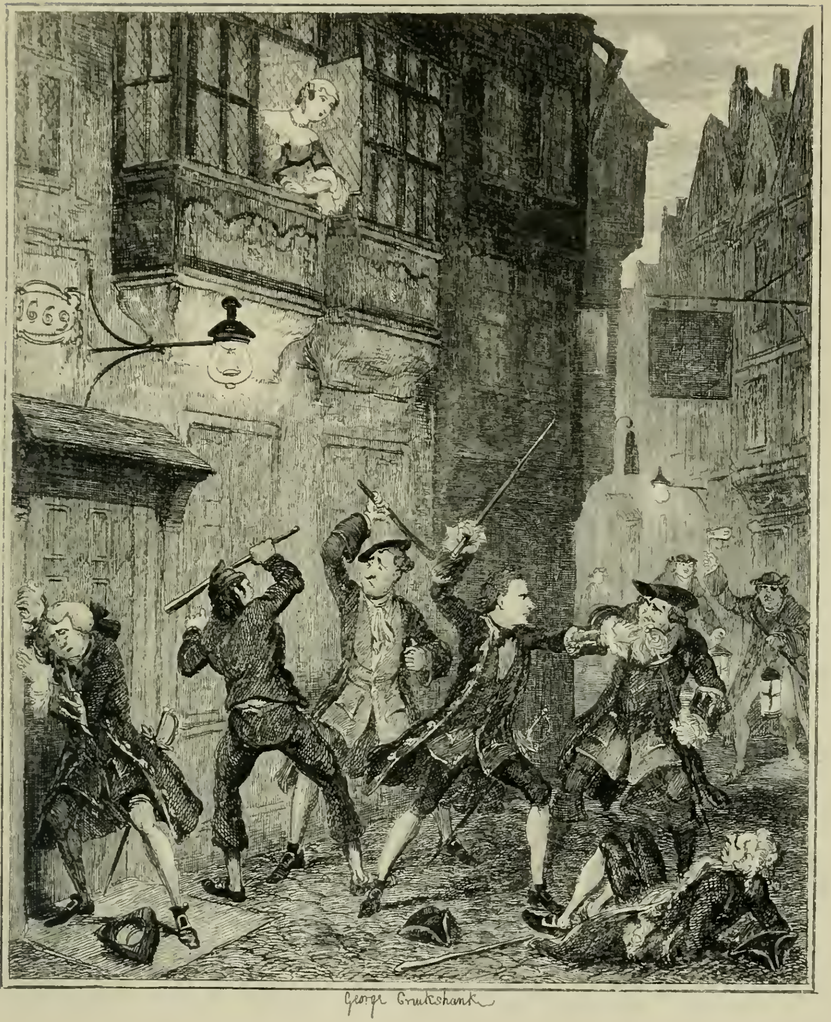
Seeing no chance of escape, Philip Frewin suddenly started to his feet, and running towards the watchman, plucked off his wig to show the extent of the injuries he had received, and charged the others with assaulting him.

"My skull's fractured, I believe," he cried; "and if you hadn't come up, I dare say I should have been killed outright. "There," pointing to Randulph, "stands the ruffian who knocked me down."

"You yourself commenced the assault, scoundrel," replied Randulph, stepping forward; "and if you have been severely punished, you have only met with your desert."

"The subterfuge shall not serve your turn, villain," rejoined Philip. "Secure him, watchman. I'll swear he meant to rob and murder me."

"This is a serious charge, sir," said the watchman to Randulph; "and if the gen'l'man persists in it, I must take you in custody. I was in hopes, and so was you, Charley, wasn't you?" he added, appealing to the other watchman, who replied by a confirmatory grunt—"that it was only a bit of a fight between some gentlefolk about a girl, or some trifling matter of the sort,


1669
George Cruikshank

Randulph defending himself against Philip Frewin and his myrmidons.

and that it might be set to rights by a bowl of punch among 'emselves, and a crown or so to us poor fellows. But this is another matter altogether."

"What has been stated is utterly false," replied Randulph. "I was walking quietly along with my relative, who has sustained quite as much personal damage as any one in the fray, when this scoundrel, accompanied by two other ruffians, suddenly attacked me; and if it had not been for the assistance of that stout porter," pointing to Jacob Post, "I might not now be in a condition to give an explanation of the affair."

"The young gen'l'man speaks the truth, watchman," interposed Jacob; "if there's been any robbery and assault intended, it hasn't been on *his* part."

"You wont listen to what the fellow says, watchman!" cried Philip; "he's one of the gang."

"He has a jail-bird look, certainly," said the foremost, holding up his lantern to Jacob's face. "I declare I'm quite perplexed by these contradictory statements, Charley. I s'pose the best plan will be to take 'em all to the watchus?"

"I reckon so, Sam," replied the other.

"I sha'n't go!" cried Jacob, gruffly. "What'll become of my poor master, if I don't go home?"

"You hear what he says, watchman?" cried Philip. "He wants to be off. Secure him."

"Ay, ay, never fear!" cried the watchman, throwing himself on Jacob. "Spring the rattle, Charley."

His comrade obeyed, and by this time a little crowd being collected, Jacob was secured, and Randulph surrounded and made prisoner. Trussell having partly recovered from the effects of the blow, was likewise seized, and the black-muzzled Jack, who appeared much injured, was also lifted up, and supported between two men.

After some further objurgation and discussion, the foremost watchman gave the word to move on, when the door of the house near them opened, and Kitty Conway rushed forth, and made her way through the crowd, to Randulph.

"This is all a mistake!" she cried to the watchmen; "you are taking away the wrong persons. This gentleman, Mr. Randulph Crew, was coming to sup with me. I was expecting him, and hearing a noise in the street, opened my window, and witnessed the affray."

"Well, and what did you see, madam—what did you see?" demanded Philip, fiercely.

"I saw Randulph Crew knock you down," replied Kitty.

"To be sure," replied Philip; "he *did* knock me down, and would have killed me if he could. This woman's evidence corroborates my statement, watchman."

"But I heard from the shouts that you were the first assailant, Philip," replied Kitty. "Besides, Captain Culpepper was with you,—though he was beaten off by Randulph."

"Don't Philip me, ma'am!" cried the other; "I don't know you, and don't desire to know you—neither do I know anything of Captain Culpepper. You want to get off your friend, that's evident,—but it wont do. He'll pass the night in the watch-house, instead of supping with you. Go on, watchman!"

"You are worse even that I thought you, Philip!" cried Kitty, in tones of the strongest contempt.

"I shouldn't mind being locked up in the watch-house," said Jacob; "but what'll my young missis think of it?—what'll become of my poor master? If anythin' happens to him, I shall never forgive myself. I wish somebody would take a message from me to Miss Scarve in the Little Sanctuary,—it would make me more easy."

"I will take it," said Kitty; "and will explain all."

"You!" exclaimed Jacob. "No; that'll never do." But before he could get out the latter part of the speech, Kitty had retired, and he was forced away by his captors.

The party took the direction of Piccadilly, Philip Frewin walking by the side of Sam, the foremost watchman, who kept fast hold of his arm, and the others following. As they drew near the top of the Haymarket, Philip said in a low tone to the watchman,—"You'll make more out of this job by letting me go, than by detaining me."

"Which way?" asked Sam, in the same tone.

"Here are five guineas," replied Philip, slipping a purse into the other's hand; "contrive my escape, and that of the black-muzzled fellow in the sailor's dress."

Sam held the money to the light, and saw that it was all right.

"I'll manage it," he said. "So the charge you preferred against them t'others was all gammon, eh?"

"To be sure," replied Philip; "but keep them safely under lock and key till to-morrow morning, and I'll double what I've just given you. You'll find me on this spot to-morrow night at ten."

"That'll do," replied Sam. "And here we're at the top o' the Haymarket. Give me a push, and then make off as fast as you can. I'll take care of the rest. Your black-muzzled friend shall get his liberty by-and-by."

Philip obeyed these instructions to the letter. Turning suddenly upon the watchman, and thrusting him forcibly backwards, he set off as fast as his legs could carry him. Sam instantly started in pursuit, calling loudly to his brethren to take care of the other prisoners; but he returned a few minutes afterwards, out of breath, and swearing that the fellow had managed to get off.

Feigning to be in a verv ill-humour, he returned a surlv reply to Randulph's remarks on his carelessness, and hurried the prisoners along until they reached Air-street, where the watch-house was situated. The door was instantly opened by a constable, with whom Sam exchanged a few words in an undertone; after which the prisoners were led down a narrow, dirty passage, and thrust into a filthy-looking hole, furnished only with a couple of benches, on which some half-dozen persons of very equivocal appearance were seated. Sam then, for the first time, appeared to notice the absence of the black-muzzled Jack, and inquiring where he was, was told that he had also contrived to escape.

"Escaped! has he?" cried Sam, affecting to be in a great passion. "Odds-my-life! they slip out of one's fingers like eels. However, these three are safe enough, that's some comfort."

"If our accuser is gone," cried Randulph, looking round the chamber with inexpressible disgust, "why are we detained?"

"You're detained on a serious charge," replied Sam; "and I can't take upon me to let you go. But I'll fetch Mr. Foggo, the constable, and if he likes to liberate you, that'll be his concern."

So saying, he went forth with his comrades, locking the door after him.

"An agreeable situation, uncle," said Randulph to Trussell, who had seated himself on the extremity of one of the benches.

"Agreeable indeed!" echoed Trussell, with a groan. "Oh, my poor head!"

"What 'ud my dear young missis, or your good mother think of us, if they could see us in this place, and with this company?" whispered Jacob. "I'd rather have got a cracked crown myself than Mrs. Conway should call on Miss Hilda."

"So would I," rejoined Randulph.

"Come, come, no grumbling," cried Trussell, rousing himself. "I'm the greatest sufferer, after all. Everything will be set right in the morning, and in the meantime, let's pass the night as comfortably as we can. It's not the first time I've been in a watch-house. Depend upon it, we sha'n't be liberated; but I'll engage to say we can get a better room than this."

And so it turned out. In about ten minutes, Sam made his appearance, with Mr. Foggo, who said he could not discharge the prisoners till they had been before a magistrate.

"Can't you give us a little better accommodation, Mr. Foggo?" asked Trussell, slipping a guinea into his hand.

The constable said nothing, but took them into a back room, furnished with a small deal table, and three or four rush-bottomed chairs.

"This is a parlour after my poor master's own heart," said Jacob, looking at the bare walls and grated windows.

"Anything I can get for you, gen'l'men?" asked the constable, as he set a light on the table.

"I suppose we *must* stay here all night, Mr. Foggo?" observed

Trussell. "We're family men—and our ladies will be excessively distressed at our absence."

"Sorry for it, sir, but you must stay," replied the constable. "If you desire it, I dare say I can so manage it that you sha'n't come before his worship. And in the meantime, though it's against rules,—but I don't mind obliging gentlemen,—if, I say, a bowl of punch would be agreeable——"

"A bowl of punch, by all means!" cried Trussell; "here's money for it," he added, giving him another guinea.

"I see you understand our ways, sir," said the constable, bowing. And he left the room.

"Come, don't be downcast, my boy!" cried Trussell, clapping his nephew on the shoulder, "we shall have a jolly night of it, after all. My head is getting better every minute. If Hilda and your mother do hear of your adventure, they'll only laugh at it. I've been locked up a dozen times or more in my younger days, and hope I shall be again. So cheer up, my boy. Your initiation into life would have been incomplete without this occurrence."

Randulph could not help responding to his uncle's laugh, and Mr. Foggo shortly after appearing with a bowl of excellent punch, he began to think that the best way was to make himself comfortable. Jacob, too, yielded to the genial influence of the liquor, and ere long they were all laughing as merrily as if they had been at large. The bowl of punch discussed, Trussell disposed himself to slumber in his chair; Jacob stretched himself at full length on the floor; and Randulph, having paced the chamber for some time, dropped asleep likewise.

CHAPTER VII.

KITTY CONWAY AND THE LITTLE BARBER PLAY A TRICK UPON THE FAIR THOMASINE —SIR SINGLETON SPINKE IS DELUDED INTO A MARRIAGE WITH THE PRETTY ACTRESS AT THE FLEET.

Kitty Conway was as good as her word. Scarcely had the watchmen departed with their prisoners than she set out for the Little Sanctuary. With a beating heart, and trembling hand, she knocked at the miser's door; but her summons remained unanswered, and she was about to repeat it, when a little man crossed the street and addressed her.

"Mr. Scarve is very ill, ma'am," said the little man;—"dangerously ill."

"So I've heard," replied Kitty. "I wish I could make them hear," she added, knocking again, and waiting vainly for an answer.

"I fear you've come on a fruitless errand," said the little man, who still remained standing near her; "the porter is from home."

"I know it—I know it," replied Kitty, hastily. "He has been taken to the watch-house. I want to see Miss Scarve, to ell her so."

"What!" exclaimed the other, starting. "Jacob Post taken to the watch-house. This is an extraordinary event. Would," he added, with a groan, "that another person I could mention were taken there, too!"

"And pray who may be the person implied by your amiable wish?" asked Kitty.

"Sir Singleton Spinke," replied the little man. "Do you know him, ma'am?"

"Perfectly well," replied Kitty.

"Then you don't require to be told what a dreadful old rake he is," replied the other; "nor will you wonder at my resentment against him, when I tell you he has attempted to run away with my betrothed."

"Your betrothed!" exclaimed Kitty. "Pray what is her name?"

"She is generally denominated the fair Thomasine," replied the other; "but perhaps I ought to call her Miss Deacle."

"Ah! then I know who you are, my little friend," rejoined Kitty; "you are Peter Pokerich, the barber."

"Right, madam," he replied, "I am that unfortunate individual."

"And how does Sir Singleton mean to rob you of your mistress?—let me hear," asked Kitty.

"He has made her an offer of marriage," replied Peter, "and she has accepted him—perfidious that she is! I asked her to sup with me to-night, for the last time, that I might have an opportunity of upbraiding her, and she has accepted the invitation. I'm waiting for her now, for she cant get out till the old people go to bed."

As he spoke, the mercer's door opened, and a female figure issued from it.

"There she is, I declare!" cried the little barber. "I'm so angry with her for her treachery, that I could almost kill her."

"Don't think of such nonsense," replied Kitty. "If you want to revenge yourself, I'll tell you how to do it. Pretend to make love to me."

"That's easily done," replied the barber. "Permit me to take your hand. I'll affect not to see the deceitful little hussy. Let me entreat you, madam," he added, putting on an impassioned air, "to come in with me. We can converse so much more pleasantly than in the street. Somebody may overhear us."

"Somebody *does* overhear you, you little wretch!" cried the fair Thomasine, stopping. "Good gracious! if he isn't making love to the woman. I wonder who she can be."

"She sees us," whispered Kitty; "the plan will do. I'll feign reluctance.—Oh, no, I can't go in with you," she added, irresolutely.

"I beseech you, do," replied Peter. "I expected a visit from a neighbour,—Miss Thomasine Deacle, and I've prepared a little supper for her; but I wont wait."

"And so you want me to take her place?" cried Kitty. "Very flattering, indeed! I dare say you'll try to persuade me next, that you prefer me to her."

"So I do!" cried Peter; "I prefer you incomparably. You're a thousand times prettier than she is."

"I shall burst with rage!" cried the fair Thomasine. "I could tear his disagreeable little eyes out."

"Well, since you're so pressing, I'll just go in for a moment," said Kitty; "but I wont sit down—and as to supper——"

"You'll just eat a mouthful?" replied Peter.

"Oh, I've no doubt she'll enjoy herself nicely!" said the fair Thomasine; "but I'll spoil their pastime—that I will!"

"This way, madam!" cried Peter, handing the pretty actress towards his dwelling.

"She's close behind us!" whispered Kitty; "contrive to let her get in without observation."

Peter signified his assent in a whisper, and pretending to offer the most gallant attentions to the actress, left the door purposely open. Unconscious of the trick practised upon her, the fair Thomasine slipped in after them, and hid herself behind a large wooden case, on which several wig-blocks were set.

Having caught a glimpse of what had occurred, Kitty squeezed Peter's hand to let him know how matters stood, and he immediately took the hint.

"I declare I've left the door open," he said, locking it; "how excessively careless in me! The fair Thomasine might get in, and surprise us."

"She has been beforehand with you, sir," muttered the young lady alluded to, looking up for an instant from behind the case.

"And now, ma'am," said Peter, lighting a couple of candles, and placing them on the table, on which cold chickens and other viands were laid, "you'll take a little supper with me?"

"Well, it looks so nice that it almost tempts me," said Kitty, seating herself. "I think I could manage the wing of a chicken."

Having helped her as she required, Peter ran to a cupboard, and brought out a bottle of wine.

"This is some delicious Constantia which I got for the fair Thomasine," he said, pouring out a glass; "but I'm glad you'll drink it instead of her."

"Here's to our absent friends," said Kitty, taking the glass.

"I pledge you," rejoined the little barber; "though I should be sorry to change my present friend for any absent one."

"Oh, the horrid, deceitful little monster!" cried the fair Thomasine. "He was never half so gallant to me."

"By-the-bye, ma'am," said Peter, "your beauty has so fascinated me that I've omitted to ask your name?"

"It is Kitty Conway," replied the lady.

"What, Mrs. Conway, the pretty actress of the Haymarket?" cried Peter.

"The same," she replied. "And so, old Sir Singleton Spinke is about to take Miss Deacle off your hands, eh?"

"I believe so," replied Peter; "and I wish him joy of his bargain—ha! ha! and her of hers, too! She wont know a day's happiness after she becomes Lady Spinke. Now, *I* should have made her a good husband—a really good husband—for I was devotedly attached to her. But some people don't know what's good for them. However, I'm delighted things have turned out in this way—I've made a capital change. Here's to our better acquaintance," he added, filling the glasses again.

"The amorous little wretch will get tipsy, and propose to her, I expect," said the fair Thomasine.

"Sir Singleton Spinke, as I told you, is an old friend of mine," said Kitty Conway; "he paid me great attention, and, if I had chosen, I might have been Lady Spinke; but I knew better—ha! ha!"

"I hope your objection was to Sir Singleton, and not to the married state," said Peter. "You're not sworn to single blessedness, I trust?"

"I have never given the matter serious consideration," replied the actress.

"Then do so now," replied Peter, stepping forward and throwing himself at her feet; "oh! be mine! be mine, sweet Kitty! I've no gilt coach to offer you, like Sir Singleton—no beautiful dresses, no magnificent diamonds. I can't take you to court in the morning, and to Ranelagh, Vauxhall, or some fine lady's drum in the evening. I've no temptations to hold out. But I *can* offer you sincere affection—a comfortable home—and a young husband. Yes, a young husband! I'm not a battered old beau,—but a smart, dapper little fellow, of two-and-twenty, well worth any woman's notice.—If that don't sting her, I've done," he added, in a lower tone.

"You certainly appear very amiable," said Kitty, with difficulty keeping her countenance, "and, though small, are reasonably good-looking.

"Answer me," cried the little barber, passionately—"or let me snatch a reply from your honeyed lips."

"I can stand this no longer," cried the fair Thomasine.

And bursting from her concealment, she ran up to Peter, and boxed his ears soundly.

"There! take that—and that!" she cried—"that'll teach you to make love to other ladies before my eyes."

"Halloa, madam! what do you mean by this?" cried Peter, rubbing his cheek. "How the deuce did you get into the room?—through the key-hole?"

"No matter how I got in," replied the fair Thomasine. "I've seen all that has passed, and heard all you've said. I'm astonished at you, Peter. How can you look me in the face after the shocking things you've said of me behind my back? But don't think I mind them, any more than the loss of your affection. I sha'n't bestow another thought upon you. As to you, madam——"

"Well, madam!" exclaimed Kitty, calmly.

"May you be happy with him—that's all I have to say," continued the fair Thomasine, hysterically. "May you love him as much as I could have loved him; and may you never repent interfering with the happiness of another!"

"Come, I like this, Miss Thomasine," said Peter. "It's very well for you to talk of interfering with the happiness of another; but didn't I see you listening to the addresses of that odious old beau—didn't I see him kiss your hand—didn't I hear you promise to run away with him—didn't I hear and see all this? Answer me that!"

"I will not deny that I was foolish enough to listen to Sir Singleton's addresses," replied the fair Thomasine, with dignity; "for the strongest of our sex is not proof against vanity. But I never assented to his proposal; or if I did so, it was only pretence."

"Oh, say that again, dearest Tommy—say it again!" cried Peter, delightedly.

"It was all pretence—I never meant to marry him!" repeated the fair Thomasine.

"You make me the happiest of barbers," cried Peter, catching her in his arms, and pressing her to his bosom.

"Mercy on us! what's this?" exclaimed the fair Thomasine, extricating herself from his embrace, and assuming a cold demeanour. "I thought you preferred this lady to me?"

"That was all a pretence, too," replied Peter. "The trick has succeeded to a miracle. We both of us knew you were behind that case."

"Ah! if I had only been aware of that!" cried the fair Thomasine.

"It's very well you were not, in my opinion, Miss Deacle," said Kitty Conway. "I here restore you your lover, and assure you I never had a wish to rob you of him. And now, wont you sit down to supper with us?"

Peter instantly set a chair for her, placed the wing of a chicken on her plate, poured out a glass of Constantia, and the party were soon as merry as possible. During a pause in the conversation, they heard a watchman go past, and cry the hour.

"Three quarters past eleven," said the fair Thomasine; "the old beau promised to come for me at twelve."

"I thought it was at six o'clock to-morrow morning?" said Peter.

"No, twelve to-night," replied the fair Thomasine. "Finding you had overheard him, he altered the time. We were to be married at the Fleet."

"It's a pity to disappoint him," observed Kitty, laughingly.

"How!" exclaimed Peter and the fair Thomasine, simultaneously.

"He ought to have a wife, since he has made up his mind to commit the rash act of matrimony," rejoined Kitty. "A plan just occurs to me. I'll take your place, Miss Deacle—that is, I'll disguise myself like you—conceal my features in a mask, and he'll never know the difference."

"Capital!" exclaimed Peter; "that will be turning the tables upon him with a vengeance."

"I'll lend you my columbine's dress," said the fair Thomasine; "it will just fit you—and my mask. Come with me. You haven't a moment to spare."

"The quicker the better," said Kitty; "for if I give myself time for reflection, I sha'n't do it."

They then hurried away, and Peter having helped himself to another glass of Constantia, and put out the candles, followed them, and concealed himself in an alley near the mercer's dwelling, where he could see, unobserved, all that passed.

Punctually as the Abbey clock struck twelve, the sound of wheels was heard—a carriage drew up at the corner, and the next moment, the old beau was seen cautiously advancing on the opposite side of the street. Finding the coast clear, he advanced towards the mercer's door, and tapped against it. It was partially opened, and a low voice inquired from within—"Is it you?"

"Yes, it's me, my angel," replied the old beau; "Sir Singleton Spinke—your devoted admirer!"

"I'm quite ready," replied the speaker, stepping forth, and looking exactly like the fair Thomasine dressed for the masquerade at Ranelagh.

"Why, you've got on your columbine's dress," said Sir Singleton, approvingly.

"It's the prettiest I have," replied the lady; "and I thought you would like me better in it than in any other."

"You couldn't have made a better choice," replied the old beau; "in fact, you couldn't choose amiss. By why that envious mask?"

"I put it on to hide my blushes," replied the other; "nor shall I remove it till we are united. But you must drive to the Fleet at once—I'll go nowhere else."

"I don't desire you to do so, my angel," replied the old beau; "the parson is in attendance, and in less than half an hour we shall be man and wife."

"Have you no scruple in taking me from poor Peter Pokerich?" said the lady.

"None whatever," replied the old beau. "I wish the little perruquier could be present at our marriage—it would complete his mortification."

"Well, there's no saying what may happen," replied the other, significantly; "but we've stood chattering here long enough, and may be observed."

With this, she gave her hand to her admirer, who led her to the carriage, which was instantly afterwards heard to drive off. At the same moment, the barber issued from his hiding-place, while the mercer's door opened, and the fair Thomasine came forth.

"Are they gone?" she asked.

"Yes, they're off to the Fleet," replied Peter. "Kitty Conway gave me a hint to follow them, and see the marriage performed. Will you go?"

"Willingly," replied the fair Thomasine.

And hurrying off to the stairs near Westminster Bridge, they took a boat, and ordered the waterman to row as quickly as he could to Blackfriars-Stairs. Luckily the tide was in their favour, so that the transit was quickly accomplished.

Meanwhile, the carriage containing the old beau and the actress rolled rapidly along the Strand and Fleet-street, and drew up before a mean-looking house near the prison. A lamp threw a faint glimmer upon a sign over the door, displaying two hands joined together, with the words—"MARRIAGES PERFORMED HERE," inscribed beneath it. Some chairmen and link-boys were standing at the door, but they were pushed aside by the old beau's footman. As Sir Singleton alighted, a short, stout, red-faced man, in a clerical garb, issued forth. This was Doctor Gaynam, the most noted of the Fleet parsons. He wore a rusty cassock and full-bottomed wig, filled with flour, instead of powder, which contrasted strongly with his purple blotchy face, and nose studded with carbuncles.

"This way—this way, my handsome gentleman and fair lady," said Doctor Gaynam, repeating his customary formula, and leading the pair down a passage in which there was a glass door, giving a view of two or three wedding parties, drinking and dancing. "We are ready for you," he added, opening a door, and ushering them into a small back room, where there were two other persons, who turned out to be the clerk and the register. The latter was seated at a desk, and had a large book, like a ledger, before him.

"As you may not perhaps be aware of the practice here, sir," said Doctor Gaynam to Sir Singleton, "I will take the liberty to inform you of it. Our rule is always to take the fees beforehand, to prevent misunderstanding—merely to prevent misunderstanding, sir."

The old beau immediately produced his purse, and gave five guineas to the clergyman, a couple to the register, and one to the clerk. This liberality produced a corresponding effect upon the parties.

"I have the honour to see Sir Singleton Spinke, sir, I believe," said the register. "Is that the name you desire to be married by?" he added, significantly.

"Certainly," said the old beau, "and the name of the lady is——"

"The name *I* wish to be married by is written down on this paper," said Kitty, in a low tone, delivering a leaf torn from her tablets, to the register.

"Ah, the dear, sly rogue!" cried Sir Singleton, squeezing her hand.

Doctor Gaynam then placed the parties on either side of him, and commenced reading the service. The register gave the lady away, and at the same time placed the slip of paper before the clergyman, who proceeding with the ceremony, gave out the lady's name as Kitty—an appellation which somewhat astounded the old beau. He, however, repeated the words after the Doctor, and so did the lady, and in due time the marriage was completed. Just as the ring was placed on the bride's finger, two other persons entered the room; but as they kept near the door, and as Doctor Gaynam supposed them to be another couple waiting their turn to be united, no notice was taken of them. But when all was over, these two persons advanced, and proved to be no other than Peter Pokerich and the fair Thomasine.

"Why, what in the name of wonder is this?" cried the old beau, staring in astonishment. "The likeness is marvellous. Are there two fair Thomasines? But no,—it can't be. Who the deuce have I married?"

"You shall see," replied the bride, unmasking.

"Kitty Conway!" exclaimed Sir Singleton.

"Yes, Kitty Conway is the name her ladyship was married by," said the register; "I've just entered it in the book."

"We've come to offer you our best congratulations, Sir Singleton," said Peter.

"And to wish you many years of happiness," added the fair Thomasine.

"Well, I'm nicely tricked, indeed," cried the old beau. "Egad," he added, gazing at the bride, who really looked very beautiful, "I don't know but what I've the best of the bargain, after all. Kitty is decidedly the smarter and prettier of the two, and if she *has* flirted a little, I don't mind it. Lady Singleton Spinke," he said, giving her his hand, "our carriage awaits us. I know nothing of these persons," pointing to Peter and the fair Thomasine. "Mr. Register, will you have the goodness to tell my servants to drive home—to Pall Mall?"

Lady Spinke waved her hand kindly to the barber and his companion, who watched her enter the carriage, and drive off.

"Upon my word, I begin to think I've thrown a good chance away," observed the fair Thomasine, with something like a sigh.

"Oh! don't say so, my darling," cried Peter; there's no security in a Fleet marriage. It may be set aside in a month."

"Now, my handsome couple," cried Doctor Gaynam, who had followed them to the door, "don't you want the parson?—wont you step in and be married? The fees will be only twelve shillings to you—one shilling the clerk, and one the register."

"What say you, sweetest," said Peter—"shall we be for ever united?"

"For ever!" echoed the fair Thomasine. "Why, you've just said that a Fleet marriage can be set aside in a month. No, I thank you. If I'm married at all—especially to a barber—I'll be married properly. Take me back to the Little Sanctuary directly."

CHAPTER VIII

OF THE VISIT OF PHILIP FREWIN AND DIGGS TO THE MISER, AND WHAT THEY OBTAINED FROM HIM.

Having made his escape from the watchmen, as before related, Philip Frewin ran on, without stopping, past Charing Cross and Whitehall, until he reached King-street, when he relaxed his pace. He then struck into Ox Yard, and entered the Crown Inn, within it, pushing past the waiter, who stared aghast at his blood-stained appearance—though broken pates were matters of common occurrence in those days, as may be seen from Hogarth's prints—and made his way to a room where he found Diggs seated at a table, with glasses and a bowl of punch before him. The attorney had been asleep, but he roused himself on Philip's entrance.

"Why, you appear to have come off the worst in this encounter?" he said, looking at him—"I was afraid it would be so."

"Ay, devil take it!" exclaimed Philip. "He's a more desperate fellow than I thought him. We should have done well enough but for Jacob Post."

"Jacob Post!" repeated Diggs—"how came he there?"

Philip told him what had occurred.

"Well, I thought it an ill-advised proceeding from the first," said Diggs, as the other concluded his recital. "I wish you hadn't chanced to hear he was going to sup with Kitty Conway. This would never have happened!"

"Curse him!" cried Philip, furiously. "He has robbed me of two mistresses and a fortune, and I'll be revenged on him—deeply revenged!—I swear it!"

"It is vexatious," replied Diggs, coolly, "and he has crossed your path somewhat unluckily. Still, as far as Kitty Conway is concerned, I think he did you a service in taking her off your hands. But, I repeat, I'm sorry you meddled with him to-night. You've enough to do just now without thinking of revenge, and the greatest triumph you can have over him will be to get as much as possible from your uncle Scarve, and thereby reduce Hilda's fortune—for, take my word for it, she will marry him when the old man dies."

"And his days are numbered?" observed Philip.

"Undoubtedly," replied Diggs. "Ah, Philip! if you had but played your cards well, what a fortune might be yours! It would have repaired all your folly and extravagance."

"Come, come, Diggs, no preaching," said Philip, angrily. "What is past is past."

"But I *will* preach, as you call it," cried the attorney, somewhat sharply; "because I am the chief sufferer by your extravagance. You have been a profligate and a gambler; and are now little better than a sharper. I have lost some thousands by you, and I must and will be repaid!"

"You shall be repaid, Diggs," replied Philip, in a deprecatory tone.

"But how!—and when?" thundered the attorney—"how, and when, sir?—answer me that?"

Philip was silent.

"You can have the five thousand pounds you got from my uncle," he said, at length.

"That is gone," replied the attorney.

"Gone!" cried Philip—"why, you offered to place the money in my hands yourself!"

"I have found a better use for it," said Diggs, "and during your absence it has been removed."

Philip uttered a deep imprecation.

"I'll tell you what I've done with it," said Diggs; "I've given it to a most important client of mine—an agent for the Jacobite party, to whose use it will be applied. Your uncle Scarve is a Jacobite, and I told him this money would be employed for that cause, and gave him a memorandum that if it prospered he should receive double the amount. Therefore, I am all right; and to be plain with you, I never meant you to have the money."

"You are a consummate scoundrel, Diggs, and have tricked me most infamously," said Philip, angrily.

"No such thing," replied Diggs.

"I say you have," cried Philip. "I have wasted my property, it is true; but you have helped me to do so by your extortionate demands. You have raised money for me at such usurious interest, that you have beggared me while enriching yourself, for I know you've come in for your share of the spoil."

"Ha! ha! ha!" cried Diggs, leaning back in his chair, and indulging in a loud fit of merriment.

"I'll not be laughed at," cried Philip, striding up to him, and shaking his hand in his face; "leave off—or I'll make you."

"Sit down," said Diggs, calmly; "you'll gain nothing by passion, but may by quietude."

Accustomed to obey him, Philip sullenly complied.

"Now listen to me," pursued the attorney; "for I've a good deal to tell you, and that will surprise you. You know that Randulph Crew's father died greatly embarrassed, and that Randulph assigned his estates to the creditors."

"Well, what of that?" asked Philip.

"You shall hear, if you're quiet," cried Diggs, "but not otherwise. Mr. Crew's principal creditor was a person named Isaacs, a Jew, who had advanced him money at most usurious interest."

"As you have done to me," observed Philip. "The man who gets into such hands is sure to be ruined."

"Cunning as he was," pursued Diggs, without noticing the remark, "Isaacs got into difficulties, and assigned his securities to his chief creditor, Mr. Nettleship, a tallow-chandler in the city, who died about six months ago, and whose affairs proving greatly embarrassed, the arrangement of them was committed to me by his surviving partner, Mr. Rathbone. On examining the claims on the Crew estate, I found they could not be legally substantiated, and, therefore, instead of being worth sixty thousand pounds, as he imagined, the securities are not worth a twentieth part of that amount. These facts being made known to the agent of the Jacobite party, who is, as I have stated, a client of mine, he wished to get these papers into his hands, and Mr. Scarve's money has been appropriated to their purchase."

"The devil it has!" exclaimed Philip; "and what use does the agent intend to make of them?"

"He means to give Randulph back his property, provided he joins the Jacobite cause," replied the attorney, "but on no other condition. And in my opinion it will never be fulfilled. But what is more, your uncle Scarve is bound under a heavy penalty to give his daughter to Randulph Crew. But neither will this be accomplished, unless the young man turns Jacobite."

"And what is all this to me?" cried Philip. "Or, rather, what am I to gain by it."

"That depends upon yourself," replied Diggs. "It is plain you can never marry your cousin Hilda; and it is plain also that if Randulph turns Jacobite he will marry her, and obtain her property and his own. You have, therefore, no hope but in persuading your uncle to make you his heir."

"And do you think that can be accomplished?" asked Philip, eagerly.

"I think it may be," replied the attorney; "and if attempted, no time should be lost."

"Why not make the experiment to-night?" said Philip. "Jacob is out of the way."

"That is something, certainly," replied the attorney; "but the hour is late."

"There is no telling what may happen to-morrow,' said Philip. "We can but fail."

After a little consideration, Diggs assented; and Philip, retiring to an inner room, washed the sanguine stains from his face, mended his broken pate with a patch, and covered all with an old scratch wig. He then put on the tattered garb he was accustomed to wear on his visits to his uncle, and returning to Diggs, they quitted the inn by a private door, and proceeded to the Little Sanctuary.

Knocking loudly, they were answered by Mrs. Clinton, who seemed greatly surprised, and by no means pleased, to see them. Diggs told her he had business with Mr. Scarve that could not be delayed, and pushing past her, walked down the passage towards the parlour, followed by Philip, where they found Hilda. She had been seated at the table, reading that sacred volume which exercises the most soothing influence on the mind in seasons of trouble; but she arose on hearing their approach. Diggs repeated what he had stated to Mrs. Clinton, and asked permission to walk up-stairs to the miser's room.

"Your business must be important if it cannot be postponed till to-morrow," said Hilda.

"It cannot be postponed, Miss Scarve," replied the attorney; "in your father's present state of health, delays might be dangerous, and the urgency of the case must plead my excuse."

"Well, sir, if you are resolved to see him," replied Hilda, "you will find him in his own room He is not gone to bed. You know your way."

"I do," replied the attorney, going towards the stairs.

"You need not expect Jacob Post home to-night, Hilda," observed Philip Frewin; "he has got shut up in the watch-house for assisting Randulph Crew in a street disturbance. I saw them taken off myself." And chuckling at the alarm produced by this intelligence, he followed the attorney up-stairs.

The miser was seated in his easy chair, near the fire; his knees almost thrust into the scantily-supplied grate; and his skinny hands extended over the flame. A farthing candle was burning on the table. On hearing the door open, he cried, without looking round, in a querulous tone—

"So you've come at last, Jacob, have you?" Where have you been, rascal? You've kept me up very late, for I couldn't go to bed till you came home. I'll not leave you a farthing in my will, if you serve me such a trick again—not a farthing!"

"It's not Jacob, sir," said the attorney, advancing—"It's me—Mr. Diggs."

"Diggs!" exclaimed the miser, looking round. "What brings you here at this time of night?—who have you got with you?"

"Your nephew, sir,—Mr. Philip Frewin," replied the attorney. "I've come at rather an unseasonable hour, sir; but I thought it better not to delay my visit."

"You think me in danger, Diggs—I know you do—and that's the reason of your coming," said the miser. "Everybody fancies I'm going to die;—even Abel Beechcroft paid me a visit t'other night to tell me so. But though I'm ill enough, God knows, it's not all over with me yet. I may come round, Diggs—may come round. But to your business!"

"My business relates to your nephew, Mr. Scarve," said the attorney. "I know you are much too strong-minded to fear the approach of death, and though I trust my apprehensions may prove groundless, I hold it my duty to tell you that I consider your condition precarious. You may get better——"

"But the probability is I shall not!" interrupted the miser, with a ghastly grin; "that's what you mean to say, sir. Go on."

"I wish to know your sentiments in reference to the proposed alliance between Mr. Frewin and your daughter," pursued the attorney. "If anything should happen to you, is it your wish that she should marry him or Randulph Crew!"

"She shall never marry the latter!" shrieked the miser; "I'll disinherit her rather."

"Leave your property away from her, if she disobeys your injunctions and weds him—that will answer the purpose," said Diggs.

"I will—I will," rejoined the miser; "and what is more, I will leave it from her if she does not marry Philip Frewin."

"If such is your intention, the will had better be drawn up at once," said the attorney; "I will get writing materials and prepare it."

The miser assented, and turned his head thoughtfully towards the fire, while Diggs took up the candle and went down stairs for pen and ink. Though longing to address his uncle, Philip did not dare to do so, for fear of disturbing the present favourable position of things. The next moment Diggs returned, and sitting down at the table commenced drawing up the will. The miser watched the progress of his rapid pen in silent curiosity, and Philip Frewin did his best to hide the intense interest he took in the proceedings. At length, the attorney completed his task, and having glanced it over, turned to the miser, and commenced reading it to him. The effect of the instrument, which was most strongly worded, was to place Hilda completely in the power of Philip Frewin.

"It's just what I wished," said the miser, as Diggs finished; "I'll sign it."

As he tottered to the table, and sat down in the seat relinquished for him by Diggs, who placed the will before him, and a pen in his trembling fingers, the door opened, and Hilda entered the room. Though greatly startled by her appearance at this critical juncture, the attorney commanded himself as well as he could, and said hastily to the miser,—"Sign it, sir,—sign it."

But the latter would not be deprived of his triumph. He looked up at his daughter, and said, "I'm about to put an effectual bar to your marriage with Randulph Crew."

"And do you forget your solemn contract with his father?' she rejoined. "Will not you fulfil that?"

"That contract is little better than a moral obligation upon Mr. Scarve," said Diggs. "It is doubtful whether it is binding upon him, and it certainly cannot be enforced upon his representatives."

"Spoken like an honest man, sir, I must say," replied Hilda, contemptuously. "Father," she added, stepping forward, and laying her hand upon the will, "I beseech you not to sign this paper. You are not sufficiently yourself to do so, and it is infamous in Mr. Diggs to practise on you thus. Keep it by you, and sign it if you will, when you have well considered it. But not now—not now."

"You think me worse than I am, Hilda," said the miser, regarding her fixedly; "but I will undeceive you. It is true that at times my mind wanders, and my memory fails me; but I am perfectly myself at this moment. In proof of it, I will tell you what I am about to do. I am resolved you shall not marry Randulph Crew, and as I feel when I am gone that you may not respect my injunctions, I have taken care to place my property in such a state, that you forfeit it, if you do not obey them. There stands your husband, or my heir."

"You say you are yourself, father," rejoined Hilda; "but I deny it. If you were in your right mind you could not act thus. You could not render me for ever miserable. You could not separate me from one to whom I am tenderly attached, and seek to unite me to one whom I abhor. And oh! why this cruel injustice! Why seek to benefit your nephew, whose character has already been laid open to you by Mr. Beechcroft, at my expense? But do not blind yourself to the consequences of this wicked act. I will never wed Philip Frewin; and if Randulph Crew offers me his hand, I will accept him."

"Execute your will, sir," said Diggs, with a contemptuous smile; "and rest easy as to its fulfilment."

"Mark me, Hilda," rejoined the miser, trembling with passion, "I have been years in collecting my fortune. I have saved it by the greatest frugality and self-denial. I love my money as well as my own flesh and blood—nay, better; and I will not place it in the power of this spendthrift—this Randulph Crew—to be squandered away. I will give it to one who will take proper care of it; who will regard it as I have regarded it; who will watch its increase, and experience the same intense delight in its accumulation; and who will never part with it."

"You are doing the very thing you seek to avoid, father," replied Hilda. "You are placing me in the power of a profligate and a spendthrift. You are throwing your money away; and if this will is ever executed, and the money gets into your nephew's hands, so far from being hoarded up, as you expect, it will be wasted in riot and extravagance."

"She pleads solely for Randulph Crew," remarked Diggs, in a low tone, to the miser.

"I know it," replied the latter, dipping the pen into the ink.

"Father! dear father!" cried Hilda; "do not turn a deaf ear to my last appeal. If you have any love for me, do not do this."

"I have made up my mind," he answered, coldly.

And he signed it with a firm hand.

"God forgive you, father, as I do!" exclaimed Hilda, bursting into an agony of tears.

"I had better take charge of the will, sir?" said Diggs, after he had attested the signature.

The miser signified his assent, and the attorney, placing the paper carefully in his pocket, arose.

"You may depend upon your injunctions being entirely fulfilled on my part, uncle," said Philip. "Good night, and when I call again, I shall hope to find you better. Good night, fair cousin."

And saluting Hilda, who turned from him in disgust, he followed Diggs down stairs, and they made the best of their way out of the house, congratulating each other on the complete success of their infamous scheme.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. RATHBONE DIVULGES HIS PLAN TO MRS. NETTLESHIP AND PERSUADES HER TO ACT IN CONCERT WITH HIM IN HIS DESIGNS UPON THE VALET.

Mr. Cripps's plan of inveigling Mr. Rathbone into consenting to his marriage with the widow, threatened to be defeated by the precipitation of the lady herself, who now that she had made up her mind to it, declaimed strongly against the delay, and began to tax him with cooling in his ardour towards her. The valet protested to the contrary; but all would not do, and he began to fear he should be compelled to sacrifice the three thousand pounds, which went very much against his inclinations. Luckily, while he was in this dilemma, the duel occurred between his master and Randulph, and the wound which the latter had received, immediately furnished him with a pretext for absenting himself until he should have time to mature his plans. He felt too secure of his prize to be under any apprehension of being supplanted by Mr. Rathbone.

Accordingly, he despatched Antoine, the French valet, who was in his confidence, and to whom he had promised a very handsome reward, in case of his success, to the widow with a message, stating that he had been wounded in a duel, and could not leave his room for some days, but as soon as he could get out he would pay her a visit.

On receiving this distressing intelligence, Mrs. Nettleship uttered a scream, and fell back in her chair, and it required the combined assistance of Antoine and Mr. Rathbone, who chanced to be present, with abundance of rosa-solis, and ratafia, to bring her to herself.

"And where is the dear man wounded?" asked Mrs. Nettleship, faintly.

"*Dans le bras*—in de arm, madame," replied Antoine. "*Mais pas dangereusement*—not severely, madame. You shall see him again, *et de bonne heure—sur ma foi.* My master sends his lofe to you, and bids me say his wound is not so deep as that you have inflicted on him."

"The dear soul!" exclaimed Mrs. Nettleship, pathetically.

"The plot's out, now," said Mr. Rathbone, to the widow; "this is his French walet. I told you that it was Mr. Willars all the time."

"*Certainement, monsieur,*" said Antoine, "*c'est Monsieur Villers qui est mon maitre.*"

"He says Mr. Willars is his master," observed Mr. Rathbone. "I understand French a little myself. I'll ask him a question or two. I say, Monsieur What's-your-name——"

"Antoine," replied the valet, bowing.

"Well, then, Monsieur Ontwine, do you know a Mr. Cripps?"

"Creepps, sare!" cried the valet, perplexed and rather alarmed.

"Yes, Crackenthorpe Cripps," reiterated Mr. Rathbone.

"*Pardon, Monsieur,* but may I inquire why you ask the question," rejoined Antoine.

"Because we've had a visit from a person of that name," replied Mr. Rathbone, winking at the widow. "A person very like your master—very."

"*Mais, ma foi, monsieur!—vous ne vous méfiez pas?* You don't suspect, sare?"

"No, Monsieur Ontwine, I don't suspect, because I'm certain —your master has been deceiving us," rejoined Mr. Rathbone.

"Deceiving you, sare!" exclaimed the valet; "impossible! Mr. Villiers is a man of too much honour. He would never deceive a lady. Sare, he will call you out, when he get well, if you say so. He will run you through de ventre—what you call it—de stomach."

"For Heaven's sake, don't tell him, then, Monsieur Ontwine," cried Mr. Rathbone, alarmed. I only meant to say that Mr. Willars has passed himself off as his own walet—as Mr. Cripps."

"*Quoi!*" exclaimed Antoine. "Mr. Villiers pass himself off as Creepps—is that it?"

"Yes, that's it, Monsieur Ontwine," replied Mr. Rathbone; "but we smoked him directly—we couldn't mistake him for a walet—ha! ha!"

"*Ah, vraiment non, monsieur!*" replied Antoine, joining in the laugh—"impossible!"

"There could be no mistake in your case, Monsieur Ontwine," pursued Mr. Rathbone; "but with Mr. Willars it's a different matter."

"Very different, sare," replied Antoine, gravely; and muttering to himself—"*bête! niais!*" he added aloud, to Mrs. Nettleship, "Has madame any commands to honour me with for my master?"

"Say how sorry I am for him," replied the widow. "I wish I might come and nurse him."

"Mr. Villiers will be *bien flatté*, I'm sure," replied the valet—"but he could not tink of such a ting."

"Nor anybody else," replied Mr. Rathbone. "It would be highly improper. No, he'll soon be well, and will come and pay his respects to you himself."

"My master's first visit will be rendered to you, madame," said the valet. And, with a profound bow he took his leave.

As soon as Antoine was gone, Mr. Rathbone drew a chair near Mrs. Nettleship.

"My dear Mrs. N.," he began, "I'm glad to find things in such a good train with your beau."

"You're very obleeging to say so, Mr. R.," replied the widow, "and it's more than could be expected from you, considering the relations in which we once stood together."

"Now, my dear Mrs. N.," pursued Rathbone, "I'm going to act as a friend to you." Don't deceive yourself. You fancy Mr Willars in love with you, but I'll tell you the truth—he's only in love with your fortune."

"You're his rival, Mr. R.," said the widow, turning up her nose.

"No, I ain't, Mrs. N.," replied the other; "and if you want to see whether he loves you or your fortune best, tell him what I'm going to tell you. You must know," he added, in an altered tone—"that in winding up your husband's affairs, I find, instead of his being the wealthy man he was supposed, that he died greatly in debt."

"In debt!" screamed the widow, pushing back her chair. "In debt, Mr. R.!"

"In debt, my dear Mrs. N.," repeated Mr. Rathbone; "but don't faint—there isn't time for it just now,—and there's nobody but me to see you. Your case stands thus:—You have nothing—nay, less than nothing—for all your husband's property will be seized. I've kept the secret safe enough to this moment, and I'll keep it till you're married, if I can. Now, perhaps, you begin to perceive my motive for giving you up so easily, and for encouraging the beau."

"Too plainly," sighed the widow. "But what's to be done, for I begin to think with you, that if Mr. Willars finds this out, he may be off his bargain?"

"He never shall find it out," replied Mr. Rathbone, "if you'll promise to pay me the three thousand pounds to be forfeited by you in case of your breaking your marriage contract with me; and I'll tell you how to do it. He believes you to be worth fifty thousand pounds—ha! ha!—and I've taken care to favour the notion—he! he!—you shall give him the whole of your property, and make him settle five thousand pounds of his own upon you. I'll be your trustee; and the money must be paid into my hands. Thus you'll get a young gay husband, and saddle him with your debts."

"I can't do it," said the widow; "I tremble at the thought of such dreadful deception. "Why, it's little better than swindling. I'll explain my situation to him, and throw myself upon his compassion."

"And lose him, as sure as my name's Tom Rathbone," replied the other.

"Well, I place myself in your hands," said the widow; "it's a frightful position."

"We must lose no time in bringing the matter to an issue," rejoined Mr. Rathbone. "My attorney, Mr. Diggs, will prepare the settlement for you. Keep up your spirits—it'll be all right—ha! ha!" and he took his departure.

Mrs. Nettleship took to her bed for a couple of days, at the end of which time she grew more composed, had another interview with Mr. Rathbone, requested him to show her her husband's books, and having satisfied herself that his statement was correct, promised to follow his instructions implicitly.

At the end of a fortnight, Mr. Cripps presented himself in Billiter-square. He looked very pale, for he had been drinking freely the night before with the Duke of Doncaster's gentleman; but this circumstance only lent him additional interest in the eyes of Mrs. Nettleship. As preconcerted, soon after his arrival, Mr. Rathbone entered the room.

"Ah, Mr. Willars!" said the latter—"Glad to see you out again. Hope you killed your man—ha! ha!—I've been thinking a good deal about you during your absence."

"I hope you've made up your mind to release Mrs. Nettleship from her engagement to you, Mr. Rathbone?" replied Mr. Cripps.

"Before I reply, I must ask Mrs. Nettleship one or two questions," replied the other. "Is it your intention to marry Mr. Willars, ma'am?"

"La! Mr. R., what a question!" replied the widow. "However, I'll answer it. It is."

"And how do you mean to settle your property, madam?—on yourself, I hope?" rejoined Mr. Rathbone. "I've no doubt Mr. Willars will make an excellent husband. But you are bound to take care of your own."

"I sha'n't settle it at all," said Mrs. Nettleship—"if I give him myself, my fortune follows as a matter of course."

"You are an angel," cried Mr. Cripps, rapturously; "and if you hadn't a farthing, instead of being as wealthy and beautiful as you are, you would be equally dear to me."

"Are you quite sure?" cried Mrs. Nettleship.

"'Pon rep!" replied the valet, pressing his heart.

"Well, then——" cried the widow.

"Mrs. N. is about to test your sincerity by representing her circumstances as very different from what they are," interrupted Mr. Rathbone. "She told me she would do so. But I don't think it a fair joke; and I therefore put you on your guard against it."

"It might have startled me a little," replied Mr. Cripps, forcing a laugh; "but it would have made no difference in my sentiments or intentions. And now, Mr. Rathbone, since disinterestedness is the order of the day, you, I hope, will imitate the good example set you by Mrs. Nettleship, and excuse her the three thousand pounds. I'll now tell you frankly, that my motive for pretending to be a valet was to trick you out of your consent. But finding I am dealing with a liberal, high-minded gentleman, I think it the best as well as the most straightforward course to ask you to remit the penalty. You cannot fairly claim it without forfeiting both the lady's and my good opinion; and I'm sure you don't desire to forfeit either."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," replied Mr. Rathbone, putting on an air of candour equal to that of the valet; "if you'll agree to settle five thousand pounds on Mrs. N., I will give up the contract."

"Settle five thousand pounds!" exclaimed Mr. Cripps, rather staggered.

"No great sum to a man of fortune," rejoined Mr. Rathbone "she brings you twenty times the amount."

"And herself," insinuated the widow.

"I'll act as her trustee," pursued Mr. Rathbone—"it'll be a very pretty present to her."

"I'm sure you wont hesitate, dearest," whispered the widow, "since Mr. Rathbone's so kind."

"No—no, I can't hesitate," stammered Mr. Cripps; "but just now all my money's locked up, 'pon rep!"

"Don't let that be an obstacle," said Mr. Rathbone—"you shall give me a bond for the amount—that will do just as well."

"Ah! if you're satisfied with that, I'm quite content," returned Mr. Cripps. "I thought you required the money down, and that would rather have inconvenienced me."

"Well, then, we had better settle the matter at once," said Mr. Rathbone—"I'll go and fetch my attorney, who shall prepare the bond and settlement, and then I'll deliver the contract to Mrs. Nettleship, after which there'll be no further obstacle to your union."

So saying, he quitted the room, and the lovers were left alone, together. Neither of them felt very easy; and at last the widow proposed an adjournment to the dining-room, where refreshments were set out, and a few glasses of wine restored Mr. Cripps to his usual confidence and spirits.

About two hours afterwards, Mr. Rathbone returned, bringing with him Mr. Diggs. Both the settlement and the bond were prepared.

Not till that moment did it occur to Mr. Cripps that he was about to commit a forgery. He gazed at the deeds, as if uncertain what to do; then, hastily snatching up a pen, he signed them in his master's name, and in a signature so nearly resembling Mr. Villiers's, that it could scarcely be detected from it. This done, Mr. Rathbone delivered a paper to Mrs. Nettleship, and took his departure with Diggs.

CHAPTER X

HOW MR. CRIPPS'S MARRIAGE WITH THE WIDOW WAS INTERRUPTED.

ONE morning, about a week after this, Mr. Jukes, while busied in the butler's pantry, was surprised by a visit from his nephew, who strutted in very unceremoniously, and seated himself, according to custom, on the edge of the table. He was more finely dressed than usual, being equipped in one of his master's best suits.

"Well, nunks, how are you, old fellow?" he said. "This is the last visit I shall pay you in this way."

"Glad to hear it," replied Mr. Jukes, drily.

"Your wits were ever dull, nunks," replied Mr. Cripps; "and they are now more than usually obtuse. I mean that when I visit you next, it will be in a gilt coach, like my master's."

"Body o' me!" exclaimed the butler—"what new folly is the lad dreaming of?"

"You shall hear presently, nunks," replied the valet; "but I'm quite exhausted with my walk. Give me a cup of ale, if you have no wine. Not bad tipple, 'pon rep!" he added, tossing off the glass poured out for him. "I'm going to be married, nunks."

"What, to that foolish widow?" cried Mr. Jukes.

"I'm about to marry Mrs. Nettleship," replied Mr. Cripps; "and I will thank you to speak more respectfully of one to whom you will soon be so nearly related. I'm to be married to her on Thursday next, and am come to invite you to the wedding. She has fifty thousand pounds, and it's all to be mine—no settlement—no tying up—no cursed trustees—fifty thousand pounds made over!—what do you think of that, nunks, eh?"

"I'm lost in astonishment," replied Mr. Jukes; "but take care of it when you get it. Don't fool it away."

"Leave me to manage my own concerns, nunks," rejoined the valet. "I'll take another glass of ale," he added, helping himself.

"Well, and where's the wedding to take place?" asked Mr. Jukes.

"At my master's," replied Mr. Cripps. "There'll be a dinner, and a ball after it, and a supper after that. You'll come, of course; but you mustn't come as a servant. You must lay aside your livery, and put on one of Trussell Beechcroft's suits."

"If I come at all, it'll be in my own clothes, depend upon it," replied Mr. Jukes. "But pray, does your master know what's going to take place in his house?—has he given you leave to have this dinner, and ball, and supper, eh?"

"Pshaw! nunks, do you think I'd ask him?" rejoined Mr. Cripps, helping himself to a pinch of snuff. "He's going to Newmarket on Wednesday with Sir Bulkeley Price, and they don't return till Friday. And now, nunks," pursued Mr. Cripps, fortifying himself with another pinch of snuff, "I want a little money from you. I must have all you can spare—I must, 'pon rep!"

"I thought it would end in this," replied the butler.

"'Sdeath! I ask no particular favour," rejoined Mr. Cripps—"I only want it till the day after the wedding, and that's but three days off. Come, down with a hundred, and you shall have a hundred to the back of it—you shall by this light!"

"Ods bods! how the boy talks!" cried the butler. "I've no hundreds to lend, and if I had, I wouldn't lend them on usury."

"Well, fifty I *must* have," said Mr. Cripps; "I can't do with less. Forty—you shake your head—thirty—twenty,—I'm obliged to come down like an auctioneer. You are devoid of all natural feeling, nunks; more stony-hearted than Brutus, to refuse your sister's son twenty pounds for three days, and perhaps prevent him from settling for life."

"Well," said Mr. Jukes, moved by this appeal, "I will lend you twenty guineas, nephew, but you must repay me. It's the savings of the last three years."

"Repay you, faith and troth, I will, thou best of nunkies," replied Mr. Cripps, embracing him. "I'll repay you with enormous interest."

"I don't want any interest," replied the butler; "I shall be well content with the principal."

And opening a drawer in the cupboard, he took out of it a small leather bag containing twenty guineas, which he counted and gave to his nephew.

"Twenty thousand thanks, nunks," said Mr. Cripps, pocketing the gold; "and rely upon being punctually repaid. By-the-by, if you're at all tired of your present place, and should like to serve me, I needn't say I shall be happy to engage you as butler, and to increase your wages. What do you get from old Abel?"

"Never mind what I get, nephew," replied Mr. Jukes, "I've no idea of leaving him."

"No offence, nunks," rejoined the other. "'Sdeath! it's no degradation to a man to be his nephew's butler. I know two fathers who're their sons' shoe-blacks. But you'll not fail to come to the wedding. Twelve o'clock on Thursday. Be punctual. My butler's place shall be left open for a few days, in case you should change your mind about it."

And he took his leave in high glee, while Mr. Jukes, as he shut the door after him, said dolefully to himself—

"I'm afraid I've done wrong in lending the money. However, he's my sister's son."

Having now got a larger sum in his pocket than he had ever had before, Mr. Cripps felt strongly tempted to try his luck at the gaming-table, but he resisted the temptation.

"No, no," he thought, "it wont do to hazard this money. It's everything to me just now. I shall have plenty to spare for play shortly."

On his way home, Mr. Cripps called upon Peter Pokerich, and invited him and the fair Thomasine to the wedding, the one in the capacity of groomsman, and the other in that of bridesmaid. And the invitation was delightedly accepted by both.

A great load was taken from the valet's mind on the following morning, as he helped his master into Sir Bulkeley Price's carriage, and saw him start, as he supposed, for Newmarket.

Not a moment was to be lost. Every preparation that could be made without exciting suspicion, had been made beforehand—but now Mr. Cripps set to work in earnest. He went to the Cocoa Tree and ordered, in his master's name, a first-rate dinner, with abundance of the finest wines, to be sent in on the following day. He next engaged a band of musicians for the ball, and ordered fruits, confectionary, and pastry for the supper. His fellow servants, who were all, of course, in the secret, and to whom he had promised great things as soon as he should be put in possession of the widow's fortune, assisted him in his preparations for the fête. It was arranged that the ceremony should take place in the upper chamber, where Randulph first breakfasted with the beau, and the clergyman selected to perform it was Doctor Gaynam. Thus nothing seemed wanting on the valet's part to complete the matter; and late on Wednesday evening he went to Billiter-square, to inform Mrs. Nettleship that all was ready. After a brief visit, for he was somewhat fatigued, he took a tender adieu of her, saying, as he squeezed her hand at parting—

"We shall meet to-morrow, to part no more!"

The next morning, betimes, Mr. Cripps placed himself under the hands of Antoine, who proceeded to array him in a magnificent suit, which had never been worn by his master, it having only been sent home the night before by Desmartins. It consisted of a coat of crimson-embossed velvet, richly laced with gold, breeches of the same material, and a white satin waistcoat flowered with gold. To these were added, pink silk hose rolled above the knee, superb diamond buckles, a point lace cravat, and his master's handsomest Ramillies periwig, which had been dressed by Peter Pokerich. Nearly three hours were expended in thus attiring him; and when all was completed, Antoine declared that his master had never looked half so well—a sentiment in which Mr. Cripps, as he complacently surveyed himself in the cheval-glass, entirely concurred.

A little before twelve, Peter Pokerich and the fair Thomasine arrived. The lady was dressed in white and silver, with a fly-cap with long lappets, and looked so excessively pretty, that Mr. Cripps could not help wishing she had been the bride instead of Mrs. Nettleship.

While he was welcoming them, and passing some high-flown compliments on the fair Thomasine's charms, Mr. Jukes was shown into the room; but as he was in his butler's dress, his nephew did not condescend to speak to him.

Shortly after this, Antoine announced that the bride had arrived, and Mr. Cripps hurried down stairs to meet her.

Mrs. Nettleship, who had bestowed more than ordinary pains upon her person, wore a yellow satin sack, embroidered with little dots of gold. She had large pearl ear-rings, a garnet necklace, and a diamond solitaire. Her complexion, which was naturally rather high, had been corrected by white French powder, and was further set off with abundance of little patches on her cheeks, neck, and shoulders. She carried a beautiful Indian fan, the handle of which was ornamented with precious stones. She had arrived in great state; a gilt chariot, lined with pale blue satin, hired for her from a coach-maker, by Mr. Rathbone, having formed her conveyance; and she was attended by a couple of footmen out of place, likewise hired for the occasion, habited in superb liveries of sky-blue cloth trimmed with silver, with silver shoulder-knots, and point d'Espagne hats. Mr. Rathbone, who accompanied her, was dressed in a suit of purple velvet laced with gold.

Almost bewildered by the grandeur she beheld around, the widow was led upstairs by Mr. Cripps; her wonder increased at every step she took. The two long-eared spaniels and the macaw enchanted her; but she actually screamed with delight on beholding the monkey, in his little scarlet coat and bag-wig.

Coffee, chocolate, and champagne, were then handed round by Antoine and the page; and while this was going on, the clergyman and his assistant were announced. Dr. Gaynam had a much more respectable appearance than when he officiated at Sir Singleton Spinke's marriage. He was dressed in his full canonicals, and wore a well-powdered full-bottomed wig, which Peter Pokerich would not have disdained.

Meanwhile, Mr. Cripps had seated himself by the bride on one of the couches, and was talking very tenderly to her, when he perceived his uncle approach Mr. Rathbone, as if with the intention of addressing him. He instantly arose, and taking the latter aside, whispered a few words to him, and then, having accomplished his object, which was to prevent any communication between him and Mr. Jukes, told the clergyman to proceed with the ceremony.

Doctor Gaynam was sipping a glass of usquebaugh, but he hastily gulped it down, and declared himself perfectly ready. He then took a prayer-book from the clerk, and stationed himself between the windows, motioning the others to take their places before him.

All was soon arranged. Peter Pokerich and the fair Thomasine stood near the bride; Mr. Rathbone near the bridegroom; Antoine behind him; while the group was completed by the two Africans, who had mounted a settee in the corner to obtain a full view of the ceremony. The page was on the floor keeping the dogs quiet, who were quarrelling with the monkey, and biting its tail.

Just as Dr. Gaynam had opened his book, and uttered a preliminary cough, a noise was heard at the door, and Mr. Cripps, turning to see what was the matter, beheld it open, and admit his master.

The valet's alarm was instantly communicated to the whole assemblage. Antoine shrugged his shoulders, and lifted up his hands in affright. The two Africans exchanged glances of alarm, and all eyes were directed towards the beau, who, with angry looks, and grasping his clouded cane, marched towards the valet. He was followed by Lady Brabazon, Sir Bulkeley Price, and Trussell Beechcroft. Lady Brabazon was attended by her black page, leading her dog by a riband, and this arrival excited the anger of one of the spaniels, whose furious barking set the macaw screaming.

Mr. Cripps presented a very chop-fallen appearance. All his assurance deserted him. His hands dropped to his side, and he scarcely dared to meet his master's angry gaze.

"Rascal!" exclaimed Villiers, "I have at last fairly detected you. I'll teach you to put on my clothes—to assume my name—"

"What!" screamed Mrs. Nettleship, dropping a bottle of salts, which she had placed to her nose—"isn't it really himself—isn't it Mr. Willars?"

"No, madam," replied the beau—"I am Mr. Villiers; and this rascal is only my valet, Crackenthorpe Cripps."

"This looks like the real gentleman, I must say," cried Mr. Rathbone, who was thunderstruck with surprise.

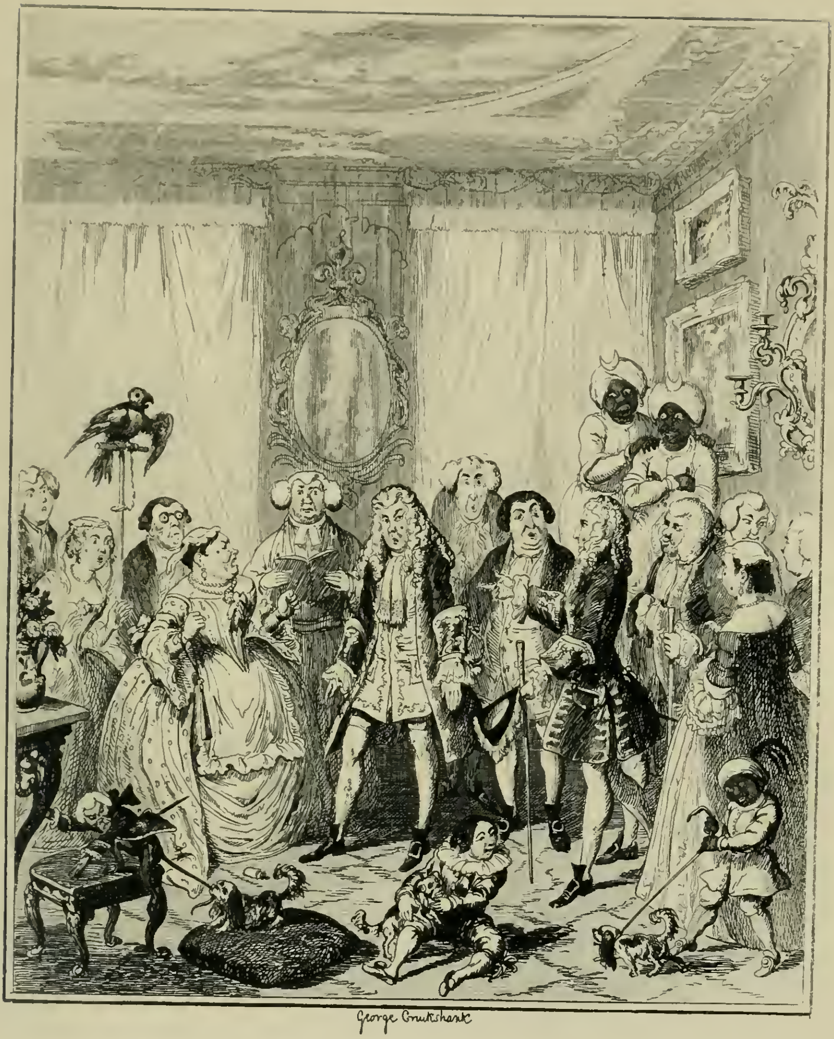
"Oh, the villain!—the base deceiver!—the impostor!" shrieked Mrs. Nettleship, clenching her hands, and regarding the valet as if she would annihilate him. "I'll tear his eyes out! To deceive and expose me in this way—to—to—to—oh! I shall never survive it. Support me!" she added, falling into the arms of the fair Thomasine.

"This is really too bad of you, sir," said Mr. Cripps, who began to recover himself a little. "You've deceived *me.* I thought you were at Newmarket."

"I received information of your practices, rascal," replied the beau, "and resolving to see to what extent you carried them, I only went to a short distance from town, and then returned with Sir Bulkeley Price, with whom I have remained till now. And a pretty discovery I've made, i'faith! My house filled with company—my servants turned into your servants—a dinner, supper, confectionary, wine, fruit, musicians, and the devil knows what, ordered at my expense."

"Well, they're not thrown away, sir," replied Mr. Cripps. "You can marry the lady yourself, if you think proper. I've no doubt she'll consent to the exchange, and she has fifty thousand pounds."

"Oh, the impudence!" exclaimed Mrs. Nettleship, jumping


George Cruikshank

M^{r} Cripps detected.

up. "I'll not be taken in a second time. I'll be revenged on all the sex!"

"You are not aware, Mr. Willars, of the extensive frauds this rascal has practised upon you," said Mr. Rathbone. "He has actually signed a bond for five thousand pounds in your name, which I have in my pocket."

"The devil he has!" exclaimed Villiers.

"But it is of no effect since the marriage has not taken place," said Mr. Cripps; "and if Mr. Villiers chooses to take the lady, he will of course pay you himself."

In spite of himself, the beau could not help laughing.

"Bad as Mr. Cripps is, he is not worse than the other party," said Trussell, stepping forward; "while he was duping them, they tried to dupe him. I understand from Mr. Jukes, who has it on unquestionable authority, that Mrs. Nettleship, so far from being a wealthy widow, is greatly in debt, while her friend there, Mr. Rathbone, hoped to pocket the five thousand pounds secured by the bond he has mentioned."

"Gadso! then it seems I've had an escape!" cried Mr. Cripps.

"You have," replied Trussell; "and your uncle would have told you all this before, if you had not kept him at a distance."

"I wont stay here to be laughed at!" cried the widow, looking defiance at the jeering countenances around her. "Mr. Rathbone, your arm. I'll make you marry me yourself, or pay the penalty of the contract," she added, in a whisper.

"You'll not mistake a valet for a gentleman after this, Monsieur Rathbone," said Antoine—"ha! ha!"

"You had better go away by the back stairs," said Trussell, stopping them; "for there are a couple of officers in the hall, waiting to arrest you!"

"Curse on it! I sent them myself," said Mr. Rathbone, "to compel the rascal I supposed to be Mr. Willars to pay your debts."

And hurrying out of the room, he acted upon Trussell's suggestion.

"And now, rascal," said the beau to the valet, "you are no longer in my service—I discharge you. And you may thank your stars that I let you off so easily."

"I was about to discharge *you*, sir," rejoined the valet, impertinently. "I don't desire to live with a gentleman who takes his servants by surprise. He's as bad as a jealous husband."

"Stay!" cried the beau—"you don't leave me in that way. Antoine, stand by him. Now, sir, take off that peruke—take it off carefully—now the sword."

The orders were obeyed, and the wig and sword delivered to the French valet.

"Now take off the coat."

Mr. Cripps complied, with a sigh.

"Now the waistcoat."

The order was obeyed.

"Now the cravat."

And it was taken off.

"Now the diamond buckles."

"Anything else?" inquired Mr. Cripps, as he gave up the buckles. "Recollect there are ladies in the room, sir."

"Yes; take yourself off," rejoined the beau.

Even thus shorn of his splendour, Mr. Cripps maintained his customary assurance. He bowed profoundly and gracefully round, and quitted the room, amid the laughter of the company.

CHAPTER XI.

"STULTE, HAC NOCTE REPETUNT ANIMAM TUAM; ET QUÆ PARASTI, CUJUS ERUNT."—LUCÆ, XII.

"WHERE can Jacob be, I wonder?" said the miser, in a querulous tone, as he crept back to his chair by the fire, after the departure of Philip and Diggs with their prize. "What keeps him out so late?"

"I don't think he'll come home at all to-night, father," replied Hilda. "But never mind him—go to bed."

"Not come home!" echoed the miser, with a sharp cry; "if he doesn't, and that soon, too, he shall never enter my house again. How dares he go without leave? But perhaps you allowed him to do so. You begin to fancy yourself mistress here, because I can't look after you; but I'll teach you differently."

"Indeed, father, you are quite mistaken," replied Hilda, meekly. "Jacob told me he wished to go out on business of his own, and I didn't like to refuse him—especially as he said he would soon be back."

"And nicely he keeps his word," rejoined the miser; "why, he has already been absent more than two hours. But how do you know he wont be back to-night? Have you heard anything about him?"

Hilda hesitated.

"You don't suspect he has carried off anything?" continued the miser, getting up, and fixing a wildly-inquisitive glance upon her. "Has he robbed me, ha? Don't tell me a lie! He has!—I see he has!"

"You are wrong, father—he has not," replied Hilda. "I will answer with my life for Jacob's honesty. My information is derived from Philip Frewin, who told me he has got locked up, from some cause, in the watch-house. I should disbelieve the statement but that it seems borne out by his absence."

"I've no doubt of it," cried the miser—"none whatever. When he returns, he gets his dismissal."

"And what will you do without him, father?" rejoined Hilda. "You will get no one so faithful—so honest."

"Hum!" muttered the miser—"that is a consideration. You needn't stay with me any longer."

"I don't like to leave you, dear father," said Hilda. "You are very much excited; pray let me sit up with you."

"No," replied the miser, peremptorily. "Give me my gruel, and then go to bed."

In obedience to his injunctions, a small basin of gruel, and a slice of toasted bread, were presently placed before him. He swallowed a few mouthfuls, and then pushed the gruel aside.

"I have no appetite," he said. "Take care of it. It will warm up again for my supper to-morrow night."

"God grant you may be able to partake of it!" she answered, regarding him wistfully. "Father," she added, approaching him, and speaking in a supplicatory tone, "may I pray with you?"

"Not to-night," rejoined the miser. "I am seldom inclined for devotion, and just now my mind is too much disturbed for it."

"You make me very uneasy, dear father," cried Hilda, taking his hand. "Oh, do not—do not, I beseech you, postpone making up your account with your Maker! You know not how soon you may be called hence!"

"No more of this," cried the miser, shaking her off. "I tell you I am not so ill as you think me. Good night!"

"One word more before I go, father," she said. "It is not too late to revoke your unjust will."

"What I have done, I have done," he replied, and turning away, he fixed his eyes on the fire.

Oppressed with the gloomiest foreboding, she quitted the room.

On gaining the lower room, she fell upon her aunt's bosom in an agony of distress. When she was sufficiently recovered to be able to explain to Mrs. Clinton what had occurred, the good old lady was almost as much afflicted as herself.

"But that the hour is so untimely," she cried, "I would advise you to go to Mr. Beechcroft, and consult him. It would distract me if these villains should succeed in their infamous scheme."

"Providence, to whose care I resign myself, will thwart them, I am well assured!" rejoined Hilda. "I will go to Mr. Beechcroft the first thing to-morrow morning, and I am certain he will assist me if he can. And now let us retire to rest, for Jacob, it is clear, will not return."

Left to himself, the miser remained for some time cowering over the fire, and drew closer and closer to it as it burnt lower.

and diffused less warmth. At last, as it threatened to go out entirely, he scraped up all the cinders he could collect from the hearth, and throwing them upon it, kept it slightly alive.

Suddenly, as if something had crossed him, he arose, and going to the table on which the writing materials were left, took up a pen; but after gazing some time vacantly at the paper, he laid it down again, muttering, "Another time—another time!"

He then took off part of his clothes, and got into bed; but sleep fled his eyelids, and dismal thoughts, which he vainly sought to shake off, took possession of him. At length he sank into a sort of trance, during which a hideous nightmare, in the shape of a mountain of gold, laid its heavy hand upon him. Half stifled, he started bolt upright in bed, and gazed timorously round the imperfectly-lighted chamber. It was a gusty night, and the noise of the casements creaking in the wind added to his fears.

Unable to endure this state of nervous apprehension longer, he sprang out of bed, and, hastily wrapping himself in his dressing-gown, took down the pistol from the hook over the chimney, and proceeded to the closet where he fancied he heard some one trying to break in, and examined the window, but it appeared perfectly secure.

No sooner, however, was one source of dread removed, than another was aroused. His hoards might be gone! Terrified by this idea, he flew to all his hiding-places, and placed their contents on the table. His dim eyes sparkled with unnatural brilliancy as he gloated over them.

While telling over the pieces, and weighing them in his hand, a new recollection crossed him. Snatching up the candle, he hurried to a small cupboard at one side of the room, at the bottom of which lay a heap of old rags and rubbish, apparently put there out of the way. Hastily removing this dusty pile, some half-dozen leathern bags were exposed to view.

"Here they are—here they are!" he exclaimed, with a cry of childish delight. "Oh, my darlings!—my treasures!—how glad I am to see you. You give me new life. Talk of physic—pshaw! there is none like gold. The sight of it cures me in an instant. I feel well—quite well; no, not quite," he added, as a sudden giddiness seized him, and he had to catch at the closet door for support; "not quite well; but better—much better. What a memory mine must be to forget these bags—each containing two hundred guineas—that's twelve hundred! Twelve hundred guineas! and I had forgotten them. I hope I have not forgotten anything else. Let me see—oh, my head!—my head!" he continued, shaking it mournfully. "My memory's clean gone!—clean gone! But what shall I do with these bags? they're not safe here. Jacob may find them in clearing the room. I'll hide them in the cellar with the other treasure."

Utterly forgetful that the chest had been removed, he immediately set about executing his design. Listening at the door to hear that all was still, he took up two of the bags with the intention of carrying them down stairs; but finding them too heavy for him, he was obliged to content himself with one, and thus in transporting them all to the cellar, he had to perform six journeys.

The last had nearly proved fatal, for, as he tottered down the cellar steps, he missed his footing, and rolled to the bottom. With some difficulty he got up again; but heedless of the bruises he had received, he picked up his candle, which was extinguished in the fall, and returned to his bed-chamber to light it at the fire. This done, he procured the shovel, and repairing to the cellar commenced his task.

In his present state of debility and exhaustion, it cost him infinite labour to get up the bricks, and he was frequently obliged to desist from the toil, and rest himself; but though he shook in every limb—though thick damps burst from every pore, he still persevered.

Having got out the bricks, he carefully scraped off the surface of the loose sandy soil. Surprised that the spade met with no resistance, his alarm was instantly excited, and he plunged it deeply into the ground. But no chest was there!

For a few minutes he stood transfixed with despair. It never occurred to him that he had himself removed his treasure, but he concluded he had been robbed of it. At length, his anguish found vent in a piercing cry, and he rushed towards the door with the intention of calling up Jacob; but the recollection that forced itself upon him, that the porter was from home, checked him.

Other imperfect ideas thronged upon his bewildered brain. A glimmering recollection of digging up the chest crossed him, but he fancied he must have taken out its contents and buried them deeper in the ground. Somewhat calmed by the idea, he commenced digging anew with frightful ardour, and soon cleared out the soil to nearly the depth of three feet. But as he found nothing, his apprehensions returned with new force, and paralysed his efforts. Throwing aside the spade, he groped about in the sandy soil with his hands, in the hope of finding a few pieces of gold. A single piece would have satisfied him; but there was none—nothing but little pebbles mixed with the sand. His moans, while thus employed, were truly piteous.

At this juncture, his candle, which had long been expiring in the socket, went out, leaving him in total darkness. A mortal faintness seized him at the same time. He tried to get out of the hole, but fell back with the effort—his head striking against the bricks. He struggled to get up again, but in vain—his limbs refused their office. He tried to cry out for help, but a hollow, rattling sound alone issued from his throat.

At length, by a convulsive effort, he did contrive to lift his head from the ground; but that was all he could do. His hands clutched ineffectually at the sandy soil; his frame was powerless; and a stifled groan broke from his lips.

But this condition was too horrible for long endurance. The muscles of the neck relaxed; his head fell heavily backwards; and after a gasp or two, respiration ceased.

Thus died this unhappy man, unattended, in a cellar, half entombed in the hole digged as a hiding-place for a portion of his wealth—wealth for which he had sacrificed all his comforts, all his feelings, all his affections, and for which alone of late he had seemed to live. Thus he perished—a fearful example of the effects of the heart-searing vice of which he was the slave and the victim.

CHAPTER XII.

ABEL BEECHCROFT FINDS THE BODY OF THE MISER IN THE CELLAR—HIS REFLECTIONS UPON IT—JACOB'S GRIEF FOR HIS MASTER.

UNCONSCIOUS of the awful catastrophe that had occurred, Hilda, whose eyes had never closed since she sought her pillow, rose at an early hour, and set out for Abel Beechcroft's residence.

Abel had not yet left his room, but she found Mr. Jukes astir, and in some alarm at the absence of Trussell and Randulph; but she allayed his fears, by telling him what she supposed had happened to them. She was then shown into the library, and shortly afterwards Abel Beechcroft made his appearance. He was prepared for some disastrous tidings, and the moment he saw her, her looks confirmed his fears. After a kindly greeting, she proceeded to recount to him the infamous scheme practised upon her father by Philip and Diggs.

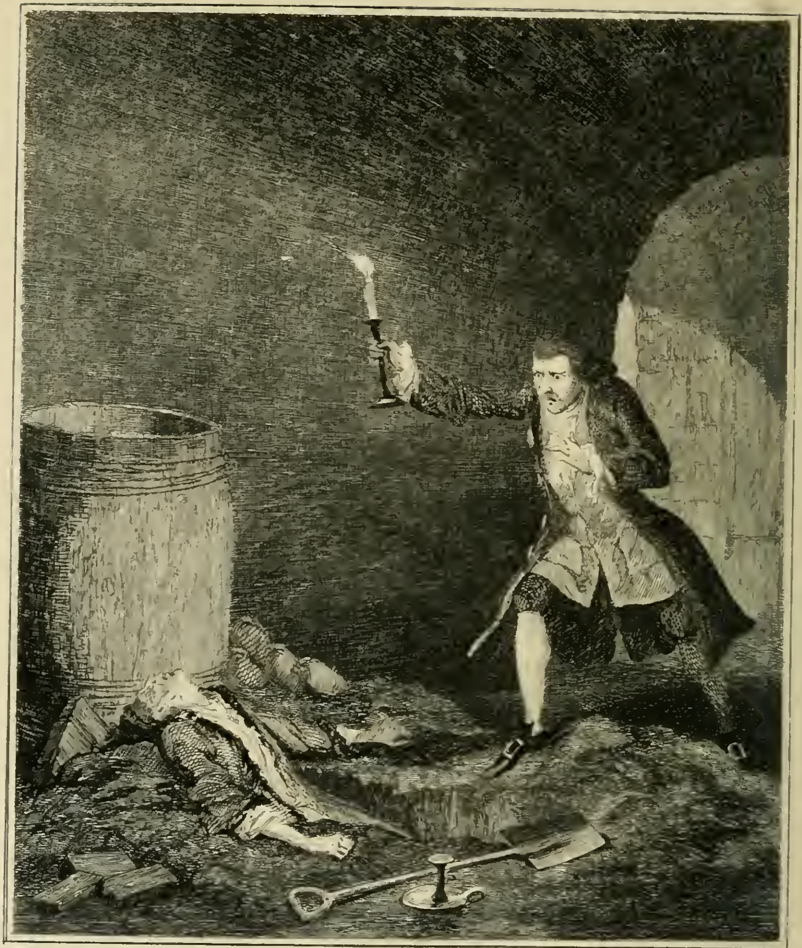
"This is worse than even I anticipated," said Abel, as she closed her recital. "Your father is infatuated on the subject of his nephew, whose conduct, as well as that of his attorney, is scandalous. I will go with you at once. If not too late, and he is in his right mind, I think I can use such arguments with your father as will induce him to alter his iniquitous design."

"I hope so," sighed Hilda; "but I have great misgivings."

As they were quitting the room, they were stopped by Mrs. Crew.

"You up at this hour, sister!" cried Abel, somewhat discomposed.

"I was informed that Miss Scarve was here," replied Mrs. Crew, "and I therefore hurried down as fast as I could. As an old friend of her mother, I naturally felt anxious to see her" And she embraced Hilda affectionately.



George Cruikshank

Abel Beechcroft discovering the body of the M[illegible]

"I am sorry to abridge your first meeting with the daughter of an old friend, Sophia," interposed Abel; "but when you are told that her father, who, you know, is in a very precarious condition, has been prevailed upon to make a will in his nephew's favour, you will see that not a moment must be lost in trying to induce him to revoke it."

"I do—I do," replied Mrs. Crew. "But where is Randolph?"

"He did not come home last night," replied Abel, sarcastically.

"Not come home!" echoed Mrs. Crew, turning pale. "What can have happened to him?"

"Nothing very particular," replied Abel, hastily. "Trussell is absent likewise. You will see them both at breakfast, I dare say. But we are losing time. Good morning, sister."

"Farewell, Hilda!" exclaimed Mrs. Crew, again embracing her. "I hope all will be accomplished that you desire. But if it should not be, it will serve only to increase our"—and she laid a slight emphasis on the pronoun—"interest in you. I already love you as if you were my own daughter."

"And believe me, your attachment is fully requited, madam," replied Hilda.

And she quitted the house with Abel Beechcroft, who displayed considerable impatience during her interview with his sister.

On their arrival at the Little Sanctuary, they were admitted by Mrs. Clinton, for Jacob had not yet returned. After some little consideration, Abel went up alone to the miser's room, and knocking two or three times, and receiving no answer, opened the door.

Approaching the bed, he found it empty, with the clothes turned down, as left by the miser; and casting a hurried glance into the closet to satisfy himself that no person was there, he hastily ran down stairs to Hilda, to acquaint her with the alarming discovery he had made.

She was greatly terrified; but after a moment's reflection, suggested that her father might possibly have gone down to the cellar, and related the circumstance which she herself had once witnessed there. Concurring in the opinion, Abel offered immediately to go in search of him; and dissuading Hilda, who secretly shared his worst apprehensions, from accompanying him, took a candle, and descended to the cellar.

As he entered the vault, he indistinctly perceived a ghastly object; and springing forward, held up the light, so as to reveal it more fully. His fancy had not deceived him. There, in a grave—evidently digged by his own hands—lay his old enemy—dead—dead!

While Abel was wrapt in contemplation of this miserable spectacle, and surrendering himself to the thoughts which it inspired, heavy steps were heard behind him, and Jacob rushed into the cellar.

"Where is he?" cried the porter, in accents of alarm. "Has anything happened? Ha! I see."

And pushing past Abel Beechcroft, he precipitated himself into the hole with his master. "All's over with him," he cried, in a voice of agony and self-reproach, and grasping the cold hand of the corpse. "This would never have happened if I had been at home. I'm in a manner his murderer."

"Another hand than yours has been at work here, Jacob," said Abel; "and terrible as your poor master's fate has been, it may prove a salutary lesson to others. There he lies, who a few hours ago was the possessor of useless thousands, the value of which he knew not—nay, the very existence of which he knew not—for the few bags of gold beside him were the only palpable treasure he owned. There he lies, who tormented himself with a vainer quest than ever lured the blind searcher after the philosopher's stone. There he lies, the saddest and most degrading proof of the vanity of human desires, having died the death of a dog, with no heart to grieve for him, no eye to weep for him."

"You're wrong in sayin' no one grieves for him, sir," rejoined Jacob, in a broken voice, "because I do. With all his faults, I loved him—nay, I think I loved him the better for his faults—and though I often talked of leavin' him, I never really meant to do so."

"Your feelings do you credit, Jacob, and are consistent with the notion I had formed of you," said Abel.

"I couldn't have said as much to him while he was alive," blubbered Jacob,—"not if he would have given me half his treasure to utter it. But I am sorry now I didn't bear his humours better."

"A natural regret, Jacob," said Abel. "The compunction we feel for unkindness exhibited by us to the dead should teach us consideration to the living. I could forgive your poor master all but the last act of his life."

"What was that?" asked Jacob, looking up.

"The leaving his property away from his daughter," replied Abel. "Philip Frewin visited him late last night, with Diggs, and induced him to make a will in his favour."

"Hell's curses on them both!" roared Jacob, in a furious tone, and springing out of the excavation. "And Philip came here! That was the reason, then, why we were locked up in the watch'us. I thought there was somethin' in it. They did well to get me out of the way. If I had been at home, I'd have killed 'em outright, if I had been hanged for it, sooner than this should have happened. And do you mean to say, sir, that he has disinherited Miss Hilda entirely?"

"Unless she marries Philip Frewin," replied Abel.

"You've dried my eyes with a vengeance," cried Jacob. "I could almost find in my heart to spurn his avaricious old carcase.

But it's not altogether his fault. The crime lies chiefly at the door of that scoundrel, Diggs. But such a will wont hold good, sir—will it?"

"I hope not," sighed Abel. "But I must now go up stairs to your young mistress, to acquaint her with her bereavement. It will be your care to remove the body."

And with a slow footstep and saddened air he quitted the vault.

CHAPTER XIII.

DIGGS AND PHILIP UNEXPECTEDLY ARRIVE—THE MISER'S WILL IS READ, AND PHILIP DECLARES HIS INTENTION OF ACTING UPON IT—ABEL UNBOSOMS HIMSELF TO HILDA.

Abel's looks as he approached Hilda convinced her of what had happened, and rendered the announcement of the melancholy tidings he had to communicate almost superfluous.

"You have lost a father, my dear child!" he said, in a tone of the deepest commiseration; "but you have a friend left who will endeavour to supply his place."

Hilda could only thank him by her looks.

"Under any circumstances, this would have been a heavy blow to you," pursued Abel, "but under the present it comes with additional severity. Still, I am sure you have fortitude to support the trial; and I trust, with the blessing of God, to restore you to your rights. Need I say my house is your home, and that of your worthy aunt, whenever you choose to remove to it."

"I feel your kindness deeply, very deeply, sir," she rejoined, "but as long as circumstances will permit me, I will stay here."

Just then a knock was heard at the door, and as no answer was returned by those within, it was opened, giving entrance to Philip Frewin and Diggs. They both appeared disconcerted on seeing Abel Beechcroft, but Diggs instantly recovered himself, and looking round, at once conjectured what had happened.

"Miss Scarve," he said, "we were passing by the house, and seeing the street-door open—a very unusual occurrence here—entered without knocking. I hope and trust nothing is amiss."

"Go into the cellar and satisfy yourself," said Abel Beechcroft, sternly.

"Good God, sir! you don't mean to insinuate that Mr. Scarve has died in the cellar!" cried the attorney.

"Oons! I hope not!" exclaimed Philip, scarcely able to conceal his satisfaction. "How is my uncle, Hilda?"

"My father is dead," she replied, in a freezing tone.

"Dead!" repeated Philip. "Lord bless me! how very sudden. Lucky we happened to turn in, Diggs. Can we do anything for you, cousin?"

Hilda made no reply, but the attorney immediately interposed.

"As your uncle's executor, and in a manner his heir, Mr. Frewin," he said, "it is your duty to seal up all his chests, cupboards, bureaux, and drawers, without delay. I will assist you."

"Hold!" exclaimed Abel, "I give you both notice that Miss Scarve considers that the will under which you propose to act has been fraudulently obtained; and she will dispute it."

"Miss Scarve will act as her feelings dictate, or as she may be advised, sir," replied the attorney; "but, in the meantime, it will but be right for Mr. Frewin to take proper precautions. Let us go to Mr. Scarve's chamber, sir."

So saying, and disregarding the looks of disgust directed against them by Abel, they went up stairs.

"Oh! do not leave me till they are gone, Mr. Beechcroft," said Hilda.

"I will not," he replied, taking a seat beside her.

Meanwhile, the attorney and his companion proceeded about their task with some semblance of feeling, but real indifference. Having glanced through the room up stairs, and swept all the poor miser's hoards, which were strewn about on the table, into a chest, which he locked, Diggs called Philip's attention to the position of the pen and paper, saying, "I am almost certain he meant to write something—perhaps revoke his will—but it was too late—ha! ha!"

With a sly chuckle, he then proceeded to seal up all the boxes and cases. In this task he was assisted by Philip Frewin, and they had just concluded it, when heavy footsteps were heard on the stairs, and the next moment the door was thrown open, and Jacob entered the room, carrying in his arms the body of his master, which he deposited on the bed.

"And this was how he died!" said Philip, casting a shuddering glance at the corpse.

"Ay, ay, you calculated your chances nicely," rejoined Jacob. "You'd cheat the devil, you would. But you haven't got the fortune yet."

"Harkee, friend Jacob," said Philip, "I will thank you to speak more respectfully to me in future, or I will let you know who is master here."

"You shall never be *my* master," replied Jacob; "and if I only get the word from my young missis, see if I don't turn you both out of the house, neck and heels."

Philip would have made an angry retort, but Diggs checked him, whispering that "it would not do just now."

"You may get off from me," pursued Jacob; "but you wont get off from Mr. Randulph Crew for your conduct towards him last night."

"I am ready to render Mr. Crew an account of my conduct whenever he may require it," replied Philip, haughtily.

"If you will follow my advice, sir, now that your prospects are fully settled, you will leave off these brawls altogether," observed Diggs. "If Mr. Randulph Crew threatens you with an assault, give him in charge of a constable, and leave the rest to me."

"I believe that will be the best plan," said Philip.

"Much the best for a coward to pursue—faugh!" exclaimed Jacob, with a look of supreme contempt.

Diggs and his companion then went down stairs to the cellar, where the bags of gold were still left, and having examined them, locked the door, and put seals upon it.

This done, they repaired to the parlour, and Diggs stepping up to Hilda, addressed her.

"Chancing to have your father's last will in my pocket, Miss Scarve," he said, "I will read it to you,—as the sooner you are made acquainted with his injunctions the better. Mr. Beechcroft, I also request your attention to the document; and you, too, Mrs. Clinton, that you may not afterwards plead ignorance of it."

And without further preliminary he read the will

"It is sufficiently intelligible, I must say," observed Abel, as he concluded; "and I must say also that I never listened to a more disgraceful document."

"You are at liberty to make any comment upon it you think fit, sir," said the attorney. "I am quite prepared for expressions of disappointment on your part."

"Why on my part, sir?" rejoined Abel.

"Because Mr. Scarve's wise disposition of his property has prevented you from securing it for your nephew, sir," replied the attorney.

A deep flush dyed Abel's pale cheek, and he fixed his kindling eye upon the attorney.

"Up to this point you have succeeded in your villany, Mr. Diggs," he said, "but you may depend upon it your triumph will be brief. That instrument will never hold good, and the manner in which you have obtained it, with other of your recent acts, will drive you from the profession, if they do not also banish you from the country."

"I laugh at your threats, sir," replied the attorney. "My position is too firm to be shaken by anything you can say or do. And you will find this will equally firm. Its motive is too apparent to admit of dispute. My late respected and lamented client wished to marry his daughter to his nephew, and fearing that she would disobey his injunctions, took care that she should not do so without forfeiting his property. Mr. Scarve had a perfect right to do this. If Miss Scarve thinks otherwise, she can dispute the will. But she will find it as difficult to be set aside, as her father, while living, was to be turned from his purpose."

"I shall act strictly up to the conditions of my uncle's will," said Philip Frewin; "and it will be a matter of deep regret to me if my fair cousin should refuse to accede to them. I will not urge her at this moment, but will call again in the course of the day for her answer." And with a supercilious bow, he took his departure with the attorney.

For some time after they were gone, not a word was uttered by the group left in the parlour. Abel was buried in deep thought, and neither of the others appeared inclined to break the silence. At length Abel roused himself, and turning to Mrs. Clinton, requested to be left alone a few minutes with Hilda; the good lady immediately withdrew.

"It may be, Hilda," he said, in a voice of much emotion—"though God forbid it should be so—that the issue of this contest will be against us, and the will be declared valid. I cannot free myself from some misgivings."

"Nor I, sir," she replied; "and yet to show you how strangely and inconsistently my father has acted, you will see from this"—and she drew forth a slip of paper from her bosom—"that he was under an obligation to the late Mr. Crew to give me to his son Randulph, with a certain dowry."

Abel glanced over the document in surprise.

"Would I had seen this in his lifetime!" he said.

"But for his violence you would have seen it, sir," she replied. "I was about to show it you when you last saw him, and was only deterred by the state of excitement into which he was thrown."

"How unfortunate!" exclaimed Abel. "But perhaps the document may still be of use."

And he arose and paced the room to and fro, in extreme agitation. At last he stopped before Hilda, regarding her fixedly.

"Answer me sincerely," he said, "do you love Randulph?"

"You need scarcely ask the question, sir," she rejoined, blushing.

"The match seems ordained by Heaven," cried Abel; "it is useless to oppose it. Listen to me, Hilda. I loved your mother—deeply, passionately loved her. By my own fault, it seems—though I understood it not then—I lost her, and she became the bride of your father. From that time I was doomed to wretchedness, and though my sufferings were hidden under the mask of indifference, the vulture of despair was perpetually gnawing at my heart. During this dreadful period, when I hated all mankind, and him most of all who I conceived had robbed me of what I held dearest on earth, you were born, and soon afterwards my sister, Mrs. Crew, gave birth to Randulph. It was whispered among our family that the two infants would suit each other, and that their union would reconcile old grievances. In the bitterness and anguish of my heart, I vowed that this should never happen, if I could prevent it; and for years I nourished the resolution, until it became rooted in my breast. Your mother died; and it might have been supposed that my sorrows and resentments would be buried in her grave; but it was not so. There are some loves, as there are some hatreds, that survive the tomb, and mine was one of them. Whatever brought her image to my mind gave me acute suffering, and I prohibited all who knew me, on pain of my displeasure, from alluding to her in any way. Thus little reached me of you or your father, till Randulph's arrival in town a few months since. To my surprise I found he had seen you; and from the manner in which he spoke of you, I perceived that he was smitten by your charms.

Hilda uttered a slight exclamation.

"I will not disguise from you," pursued Abel, "that this discovery gave me inexpressible uneasiness, and I sought by every means in my power to prevent him from seeing you again. But fate had decreed it otherwise. Chance brought you together again and again, until the final adventure at Vauxhall seemed to link your affections together indissolubly."

"It did so," observed Hilda.

"Notwithstanding all this, I could not bring myself to consent to your marriage," continued Abel; "nay, I determined to cast off Randulph for ever if he disobeyed me. My resolution was somewhat shaken by your father's illness, and I began to find my dislike to the connexion abating. Can you understand these contradictory feelings, Hilda, for I loved you all the time?"

"I can, sir," she replied.

"That which alone removed my objection," said Abel, sternly, was the sad spectacle I beheld in the cellar this morning. After the sight I there witnessed, I could not retain further animosity against the author of my misery. I can now review the past with calmness. I can now think of your mother without pain, and of your father without heart-burning; I can now love you as their child, without other feelings obtruding upon me."

And opening his arms, he folded Hilda in a strict embrace.

"Bless you! bless you, my child!" he cried. "If Randulph proves worthy of you, he shall have you."

Hilda averted her head, and there was silence between them for a brief space.

"You wished to have some communication with my poor father before his death," she said, at length. "I hope it was not of importance?"

"Only to himself," replied Abel, with a deep sigh. "I wished to forgive him for prevailing upon me, under the garb of friendship, to introduce him to your mother and her family. I wished to forgive him for the arts he used to wean her affections from me; for his misrepresentation of my circumstances and character; and for the prolonged anguish he occasioned me, and to which death would have been preferable. I wished to say thus much to him,— to hear from his own lips an avowal of his regret,—and to be at peace with him for ever!"

"You are at peace with him now, sir, I trust," said Hilda

"As far as I, myself, am concerned, I am so," replied Abel, "but for you—"

"Oh, do not think of me!" cried Hilda. "I forgive him from the bottom of my heart. He has been the dupe of others."

"Say rather he has been the bond-slave of Mammon," replied Abel, sternly, "who has destroyed him, as he destroys all his worshippers. But I will not pain you by any harsh reflections. Be assured, nothing shall be neglected to repair the injury he has done you. And now, farewell, my dear child, since you decide upon remaining here. I will see you again in the latter part of the day; and, meantime, you stand in need of some repose."

And folding her once more in his arms, he took his leave.

CHAPTER XIV

PHILIP FREWIN IS DANGEROUSLY WOUNDED BY RANDULPH—HIS LAST VINDICTIVE EFFORT.

Randulph's feelings on awaking and finding himself in the watch-house were at first humiliating and full of self-reproach. But by degrees these milder sentiments speedily gave way to anger against Philip Frewin, and so indignant did he become, on reflection, at the conduct of the latter, that he resolved that his first business, on obtaining his freedom, should be to seek him out and call him to a strict account. His wrath had by no means abated as Mr. Foggo entered the chamber, a little before eight o'clock, to call up him and his companions.

"I hope you rested well, gen'l'men," said the constable, with a somewhat malicious grin. "Will you please to have breakfast?"

"Not here, Mr. Foggo," replied Trussell, yawning. "I think you said, last night—or else I dreamt it—that it wouldn't be necessary to go before a magistrate?"

"I think it may be managed, sir," said the constable, "provided—ahem!"

"Provided we come down—eh, Mr. Foggo?" rejoined Trussell.

"Exactly, sir," replied the other.

"Do not bribe him, uncle," cried Randulph, indignantly. "We have been most unjustifiably detained, and I wish to be taken before a magistrate, that I may have an opportunity of complaining of the shameful treatment we have experienced, as well as of preferring a charge against Philip Frewin."

"Be advised by me, my dear boy, and make no further disturbance about the matter," replied Trussell. "You'll get no redress."

"But, uncle—"

"Between ourselves," interrupted Trussell, "I would rather the affair didn't come to the ears of my brother Abel, which, if we're publicly examined, will unquestionably be the case."

"That's why I recommend you not to go before his worship," observed the cunning constable; "it may be disagreeable in its consequences."

"To be sure it may," replied Trussell, slipping a guinea into his hand. "Let us out as fast as you can."

"I shall not move," said Randulph.

"Oh! it's quite optional," said Mr. Foggo, evidently disconcerted.

"I shall go, at all events," said Trussell.

"And so shall I," said Jacob. "I shall get back to my poor master as fast as I can. Lord knows what may have happened in my absence."

"Well, if you're both going, I must perforce accompany you," said Randulph; "but I protest against the step."

Mr. Foggo attended them to the door of the watch-house, and made them a most polite bow as he let them out. Taking a hasty leave of the others, Jacob set off to the Little Sanctuary, where, it is needless to say, a painful surprise awaited him.

As they walked along, Trussell proposed that they should breakfast at a coffee-house, and put their toilette a little in order before going home; and Randulph, recollecting that Jacob had mentioned the Crown Inn, Ox Yard, as a place frequented by Philip Frewin, suggested that they should go there. Trussell being perfectly agreeable to the arrangement, they bent their steps in that direction.

On arriving at the Crown, and inquiring for Philip, they learnt that he had rooms in the house, but had been out the greater part of the night, and was absent at the time. He was, however, momentarily expected, and the waiter promised to let them know when he returned.

Trussell then ordered a good breakfast, to which, after making their toilettes, they both did ample justice. At the expiration of an hour, Randulph renewed his inquiries about Philip. Still he had not returned.

"Well, if you like to wait here for him," said Trussell, "I will go home, and make some excuse for you, and will return and tell you what I have done."

The desire of avenging himself on Philip Frewin being now paramount in Randulph's breast, he readily assented to this plan, and Trussell departed. Having feed the waiter, to insure the accomplishment of his object, Randulph flung himself into a seat, and was musing over the events of the previous night, by way of keeping up his choler against Philip, when the door suddenly opened, and a man, stepping into the chamber, was about to withdraw, with an apology for his intrusion, when a cry from Randulph, who recognised him as Cordwell Firebras, checked him.

"What! is it you, Randulph?" cried Firebras, holding out his hand. "I came here to meet another person, but you are the man of all others I most wished to see. What the deuce are you doing here?"

"I am waiting to see Philip Frewin," replied Randulph. "He served me a scurvy trick last night, and got me shut up in the watch-house, and I mean to chastise him."

"I sha'n't hinder your laudable design," replied Firebras, laughing. "But," he added, closing the door, "I was about to send to you on a matter of the utmost importance. I have a proposal to make to you that affects your nearest and dearest interests. Come to me at the Chequers Inn, Millbank, a little before midnight, and I will give you proof that I hold your fortune in my hands."

"To be obtained on the same terms as heretofore?" demanded Randulph.

"Hear what I've got to propose, and then inquire the conditions," rejoined Firebras.

"Well, I will come," replied Randulph.

As he said this, the waiter entered the room, and made a sign to him that his man had arrived.

Randulph's eyes sparkled, and without saying a word, he beckoned Firebras to follow him, and, directed by the waiter, proceeded to Philip's room, which immediately adjoined his own.

Philip was not alone, he was attended by Captain Culpepper, and was laughingly counting out a sum of money for him. But his glee died away on beholding Randulph's stern looks, and he would have beaten a retreat, if Firebras had not closed the door, and planted his bulky person before it.

"What do you want here, sir?" he cried, in as fierce a tone as he could command, to Randulph. "This is my room—you have no business here. Ring the bell, Captain Culpepper."

"If the captain stirs, I will cut his throat," cried Firebras.

"If I treat you as a gentleman, scoundrel, it is more than you deserve," said Randulph, fiercely; "but I demand instant satisfaction for your conduct last night."

"I can't fight to-day, Mr. Crew," said Philip. "I'm engaged on particular business, as this gentleman knows. To-morrow, at any hour you please."

"This is a pitiful evasion, coward!" cried Randulph; "but it shall not avail you."

And he struck him with the flat of his sword.

"'Sblood! sir, hold your hand!" cried Captain Culpepper, whipping out his blade, and interposing. "Leave off this game or, by my troth, I'll slit your weazand for you."

"No you wont, captain," said Cordwell Firebras, stepping forward. "Let them settle the matter themselves. If Mr. Frewin *is* a gentleman, he will give Mr. Crew satisfaction; and if he is *not*, you must agree with me, as a man of honour, that no punishment can be too degrading for him."

"I must confess there is reason in what you say, sir," replied Culpepper. "Fight him, sir—fight him!" he whispered to Philip. "I'll help you if you require it."

"Hold your hand, ruffian!" cried Philip, exasperated by the treatment he had experienced, "and look to yourself."

And drawing his sword, he attacked Randulph with the utmost fury. It was evident, from his style of fencing, that Philip did not want skill; but his passion robbed him of judgment, and he frequently exposed himself to his antagonist, who fought with great coolness, evidently meaning to disarm him, or at most slightly wound him.

Desirous, at length, of putting an end to the conflict, Randulph assailed his adversary more vigorously, and was driving him towards the wall, when footsteps were heard hurrying along the passage. Firebras turned to lock the door to prevent interruption, and while he was thus engaged, Culpepper made a thrust at Randulph, which, fortunately, the latter was able to avoid by a sudden spring backwards.

Exasperated by this treachery, Randulph dexterously parried a thrust in carte from Philip, and instantly returning the pass, his point plunged deeply into the other's breast. Philip staggered, and would have fallen, if Culpepper had not caught him.

"Don't mind me," cried the wounded man, "attack him!—attack him! I'll give you a thousand pounds if you kill him."

"I can't do it now, sir," whispered Culpepper. "I fear you're seriously hurt."

"Yes, it's all over," groaned Philip. "Curse him, the luck's always on his side."

Meanwhile, Cordwell Firebras had rushed up to Randulph, who looked stupified at the result of the encounter.

"Get off as fast as you can," he cried, "it wont do to be taken just now. The window in that closet is open, and you are young and active, and can easily reach the ground. Repair to the Chequers at once, and keep close all day. I'll be with you before midnight."

Throwing one look of compassion at the wounded man, Randulph darted into the closet, and peeping out of the window, perceived that it looked upon the roof of a shed. Dropping upon this building, he gained a narrow alley which led him into King-street.

As soon as Randulph had made good his retreat, Firebras opened the door, and gave admittance to the landlord and some half-dozen attendants.

A surgeon was instantly sent for, and Philip placed in a chair, while Cordwell Firebras assisted in bandaging up the wound. It bled internally, and Firebras's experience told him it was highly dangerous.

"What do you think of my hurt?' asked Philip, whose aspect had already become ghastly and cadaverous.

"I'll not deceive you," replied Firebras; "you're a dead man."

"But my murderer will be hanged for it, wont he?" cried Philip, with a malignant look.

"You were fairly hit," replied Firebras. "If anybody deserves hanging, it's Captain Culpepper. I saw the foul blow he aimed at Randulph."

At this moment, Diggs entered the room, and was horror-stricken at beholding the condition of Philip Frewin.

"Why! what dreadful mischance is this?" he cried, gazing at him. "I hope you are not seriously hurt?"

"They tell me I am mortally wounded," replied Philip, with a groan; "and I believe they're right. I have only been made my uncle's heir to mock me."

"What! is Mr. Scarve dead?" cried Firebras, in surprise.

"He died last night," replied the attorney, "and Mr. Frewin, as he has just told you, is his heir, provided Hilda refuses to marry him."

"The devil!" exclaimed Firebras; "this has been a lucky blow for Randulph. I'm glad he was not aware of the fact, or the thing might have looked like premeditation."

"Get me a chair, Diggs, instantly!" cried Philip, "and take me to the Little Sanctuary. I will see Hilda before I die, and if she refuses to marry me, I'll make my will at once. I have strength to sign it."

"What madness is this?" cried Firebras.

"It's no madness," replied the other. "Get me a chair——quick—quick!"

Thus exhorted, Diggs gave the necessary instructions, and shortly afterwards a chair was brought into the room by two porters, and the wounded man placed in it. Attended by Firebras, Diggs, Culpepper, and Mr. Molson, who chanced to be the nearest surgeon, and who had just arrived,—he was transported to the miser's dwelling.

On arriving there, Cordwell Firebras hastily explained to Jacob, who answered the knock at the door, the object of their coming, and bade him urge his young mistress to see the wounded man. As soon as he had satisfied himself of the truth of the statement, which was so extraordinary that he could scarcely credit it, Jacob directed the chairmen to bring their burden along the passage into the parlour, and Philip Frewin was got out and placed in the miser's old seat.

The chairmen then withdrew, and Jacob ran up stairs to tell Hilda what had occurred, while Mr. Molson said to Philip—

"If you have any instructions to give, sir, you must not lose time, for you have not many minutes to call your own."

"Where is Hilda?" cried the wounded man. "Get pen, ink, and paper, Diggs—sit down—and write what I tell you. Is she come yet?"

"Yes, she is here," replied Firebras, as Hilda entered the room. "Miss Scarve," he added, stepping up to her, "your cousin has been desperately wounded in a duel with Randulph Crew. He has not many minutes to live. Accede to what he proposes to you," he added, in a low tone.

"Hilda," said Philip, in a faint voice, "I have sent for you to ask you, in the presence of these witnesses, whether you consent to marry me."

"You are not in a state to ask the question," she replied, with a look of mingled commiseration and abhorrence. "Think of reconciling yourself with Heaven."

"Do you refuse?" cried Philip, trying to raise himself.

"If you exert yourself in this way, you will only accelerate your end," said the surgeon.

"I *will* have an answer," replied Philip—"yes or no?"

"Consent," whispered Firebras to Hilda. "It can matter nothing."

"I cannot bring my lips to utter the word," she replied.

"I require an answer, Miss Scarve," said Diggs, "as it may affect Mr. Frewin's interest in the property, and your own."

"Then I answer, no!" she replied, firmly.

Cordwell Firebras bit his lips.

"Take down that answer, Diggs," said Philip.

The attorney complied, and when done, requested Culpepper and the surgeon to witness it, which they did.

"Now, Mr. Frewin, you are in possession of your uncle's property," said Diggs,

"Then, write out a bequest of it all," said Philip,—"of all, mind—to—to—to——"

"To whom, sir?" asked Diggs, writing with the greatest rapidity, for he saw that he had not a moment to spare.

"To yourself," faintly replied the dying man.

In a few seconds, without looking up, or exhibiting any sign of satisfaction, the attorney completed his task.

"It is done—sign it, sir," he added, placing the paper before Philip, and giving him the pen, which the latter could scarcely grasp.

It was a moment of breathless interest to all; and even Hilda bent forward.

"Where is it?" groaned Philip, trying to fix his glazing eyes on the paper.

"Here, sir—here," said Diggs, putting his finger on the place where the signature should be affixed.

But it was too late. The pen fell from Philip's grasp, and falling with his face on the table, he expired.

"Another moment, and I had been master of this property," cried Diggs, snatching up the unsigned paper.

"You could not have kept it," said Cordwell Firebras.

"Long enough to have answered my purpose," rejoined the attorney, putting on his hat, and quitting the house. He was followed in his retreat by Captain Culpepper.

"You are now undisputed mistress of your inheritance, Hilda," said Cordwell Firebras.

"Heaven be praised for it!" exclaimed Jacob. "I knew such wrongful acts would never prosper."

"To me the event is most fortunate," said Hilda; "but I wish it could have been purchased at a less price than the life of my unfortunate cousin."

"I confess I cannot pity him," said Firebras. "But you must now think of yourself. You look very pale."

"This last strange trick of fortune is almost too much for me," she rejoined.

"I would recommend you to seek an asylum with some friend, while the last mournful duties to your father are performed," said Firebras. "Why not go to Mr. Beechcroft's? Randulph's mother is there."

"I think I will follow your advice," replied Hilda; "for I cannot remain here after the shocking event that has just occurred."

"Mrs. Clinton and I will take care of the house and property," said Jacob. "I'll go and fetch a coach directly, if you're going to Mr. Beechcroft's."

And he set out on his errand, while Hilda went up stairs to her room, to make a few hasty preparations for her departure.

This done, she entered the room in which her father's remains were laid, and kneeling beside the bed, prayed fervently. She then gazed for a few moments on his wan, emaciated features, now rendered yet sharper by death, and pressing her lips upon them, quitted the room. Cordwell Firebras led her in silence to the coach, in which Jacob put the few things she took with her.

"Where is Mr. Randulph?" asked the latter, as he was about to mount the box.

"Do you know a summer-house on the banks of the river, near the mill, in Millbank?" asked Firebras.

"What, belongin' to the Chequers Inn?" rejoined Jacob. "I *should* know it, seein' as how I've passed many a pleasant hour in it."

"Well, be in a boat off it at midnight," rejoined Firebras, "and you'll hear something of Randulph."

"I wont fail," replied Jacob, springing on the box, and ordering the coachman to drive to Lambeth, while Firebras returned to the house to give some directions to Mrs. Clinton.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. CRIPPS'S ALTERED APPEARANCE—HE MYSTIFIES THE FAIR THOMASINE ABOUT LADY SPINKE—THE SEIZURE OF THE JACOBITE CLUB CONTRIVED.

On the same morning as the events previously related, while Peter Pokerich was powdering a barrister's wig, he was interrupted in his task by the sudden and rather distracted entrance of the fair Thomasine.

"What's the matter, Tommy, dear?" he inquired, unintentionally puffing a great quantity of powder into her face. "Ten thousand pardons, but you quite startled me, and made me miss my aim."

"You've nearly blinded me, you careless thing," replied the fair Thomasine, rubbing her eyes; "besides spoiling my fly-cap, and filling my hair with your nasty powder. But have you heard the dreadful—the distressing news?"

"No," replied Peter. "What is it?"

"Mr. Scarve has been found dead in his cellar," replied the fair Thomasine, in a sepulchral tone, suited to the nature of her information; "where he had digged his own grave, and tried to bury himself, to save funeral expenses."

"Lord bless us! you don't say so!" exclaimed Peter.

"Yes, I do," rejoined the fair Thomasine; "but turn your powder-puff the other way, or you'll miss your aim again. I shouldn't have been sorry for anything that happened to him,—but what do you think?—he's disinherited his own daughter, and left all his property to his nephew."

"Oh, the horrid, unnatural old monster!" exclaimed Peter, capering about, and completely emptying the powder-puff in his agitation.

"Be quiet, do, and stand still!" said the fair Thomasine, taking hold of his collar, and keeping him down. "Poor Hilda's not to have a farthing, unless she marries that odious cousin of hers; and if I'm not greatly mistaken in her, she'll die sooner than consent."

"Of course she will!" cried Peter, still plying the exhausted powder-puff. "Oh, she's a noble creature, and quite an example to her sex!"

"So I think," replied the fair Thomasine; "and till she marries

Randulph Crew, I don't marry you—that's positive? Oh, gemini! if there isn't Mr. Cripps! How altered he is, to be sure."

The latter exclamation was occasioned by the entrance of the ex-valet, who was indeed so much changed as scarcely to be recognisable. His coat was threadbare, out-at-elbows, and with the lace upon it tarnished; his waistcoat was in the same tattered condition; his nether garments were bepatched with cloths of various hues, his hose were no longer silk, but cotton very much darned; and steel buckles replaced the diamond appendages to his shoes. His dishevelled peruke stood sadly in need of the aid of Peter Pokerich; his hat was an old cocked one, with one of the sides broken, and hanging loose; and a switch supplied the place of his clouded cane. He had no lace at his wrists or at his breast; indeed, it was rather questionable, from the manner in which he buttoned up his coat, whether he had a shirt at all. Fallen, however, as he was, Mr. Cripps was Mr. Cripps still. He wore his tattered apparel with as great an air as distinguished him when equipped in all his finery; flourished his switch as if it had been a magnificent baton; took snuff out of a pewter box, with as much grace as when he manipulated one set with brilliants; and brushed away the powder with a ragged handkerchief as airily as when he boasted a perfumed and embroidered mouchoir.

"The fair Thomasine, as I live," he said, with a diving bow. "How charmingly you look, 'pon rep! I've just been to Sir Singleton Spinke's, to offer myself as his valet. But he has heard of my cussed adventure, and wont engage me."

"Did you see Lady Spinke?" asked the fair Thomasine.

"To be sure," replied Mr. Cripps, "and can report very favourably of her condition. Her old lord dotes on her. She has large monkeys and little dogs, black pages and white china, gold and silver dresses, diamonds, rubies, garnets, pearls, emeralds —everything, in short, that one of your sex can desire."

"Except a young husband," interposed Peter. "I wish my powder-puff was full," he added, aside; "I'd empty it into his mischievous throat, and choke him."

"Young husband!—fiddlestick!" cried Mr. Cripps. "Lady Spinke is a great deal too good a judge for that. She would rather be an old man's darling than a young man's warling, as the proverb hath it. And she's right, i' faith. She twists her old lord round her fingers as easily as a glove."

"Just what I should like to do with my husband," cried the fair Thomasine.

"You shall twist me round your fingers as easily as you please, my angel," cried Peter, distractedly. "Plague take him! what can have brought the fellow here?"

"Her ladyship, I needn't say, has quitted the stage," pursued Mr. Cripps. "I heard them talking of going to Ranelagh to-night."

"Ranelagh!" sighed the fair Thomasine. "How delightful!

And I've never been there since the masquerade, and I begin to fear I shall never go there again!"

"Delightful, indeed! if it only lasts!" said Mr. Cripps, who had received a secret sign from the barber.

"Lasts! what do you mean?" cried the fair Thomasine.

"Why, between ourselves," replied Mr. Cripps, with a laugh, "Sir Singleton has had eleven wives already—eleven Lady Spinkes, by this light! The present lady is the twelfth. They were all married at the Fleet."

"Oh, gemini! twelve wives!" exclaimed the fair Thomasine. "What a shocking old Turk!"

"You would say so, if you knew the history of the former Lady Spinkes as well as I do," replied Mr. Cripps. "There were actresses, singers, opera-dancers, mantua-makers, corset-makers, glove-makers, satin-shoemakers, embroiderers, and ladies of other vocations that I forget—but all young, and all very pretty—ha! ha! Why, they all came in a body to call upon him, the day after his marriage, and it took half-a-dozen constables to get them out of the house."

"And if they had torn out his wicked old eyes they would have served him right!" cried the fair Thomasine. "I've no patience with such doings. Twelve wives. Why it's as bad as a seraglio!"

"Are you now satisfied that you're not one of them, my angel!" asked the little barber.

"That I am," she replied; "but I still adhere to my resolution of not marrying you till Hilda Scarve is united to Randulph. Good morning, Mr. Cripps."

The ex-valet made one of his best bows, and handed her to the door.

"Cudslid! you ought to thank me, Pokerich," he said, laughing; "the twelve wives did the business—put her out of conceit with the old knight, eh?"

"You did it capitally," replied Peter; "and now what can I do for you in return?"

"A good deal," replied Mr. Cripps. "In the first place, you can dress my peruke, which, as you perceive, is cussedly out of order; in the second, you can perfume me; and in the third, you can lend me five guineas, for I haven't a rap to bless myself withal."

"As to dressing your wig, that I'll do with pleasure," replied the barber; "and I'll perfume you into the bargain. But I haven't five pounds to spare—I haven't, 'pon rep!"

"Don't steal my adjurations, at all events," cried Mr. Cripps; "they're the only part of my former self I have left. Devil knows what will become of me. My master wont give me a character. I've lost the twenty guineas lent me by my uncle at the gaming-table, and I can't even borrow a pistol and a prad to elp me to take a purse."

A person entering the shop at this moment, Mr. Cripps walked aside, while the barber, offering his customer a chair, went into the back room in search of a full-bottomed black wig. On more narrowly examining the new comer, Mr. Cripps recognised the Jesuit priest, Father Verselyn, and it instantly occurred to him that he could turn the discovery to account. Accordingly, he stepped quickly up to him, and said, in a low tone—

"Glad to see you, Father Verselyn—pray sit still, sir. How gets on the good cause, eh?"

"You are mistaken in me, friend," replied the priest, uneasily.

"I will soon prove the contrary, sir," rejoined Mr. Cripps, assuming a different tone. "Unless you tell me where the club now meets, I'll make you my prisoner."

The priest trembled violently.

"Answer me directly," cried Mr. Cripps, "or I call the barber to my assistance."

"At the Chequers, in Millbank," replied the priest.

"I'll have better assurance than your word," replied Mr. Cripps. "When is the next meeting?"

"To-night," replied the priest.

"Now I tell you what, father," said Mr. Cripps, "I can get three hundred pounds for their capture. You shall share it with me. No buts. A Jesuit never hesitated to betray his friends when it answered his purpose. Choose between a good reward and a prison. But here comes the barber. Do you consent?"

The Jesuit nodded.

Having settled his affairs with the barber, Father Verselyn quitted the shop, while Mr. Cripps, making a sign to Peter that he had business on hand, instantly followed him, and soon found that there was no indisposition on the priest's part to join in the scheme, provided he could do so with safety to himself.

Discussing their project, they proceeded towards Millbank, and it was arranged, on the suggestion of Verselyn, that the landlord of the Chequers, who was no other than the former host of the Rose and Crown, should be included in their design, and receive a third of the reward.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SUMMER-HOUSE AT THE CHEQUERS—THE OLD MILL—RANDULPH OVERHEARS THE PLOT—DISPERSION OF THE JACOBITE CLUB, AND FATE OF CORDWELL FIREBRAS.

As Randulph passed through the Little Sanctuary, on his way to Millbank, he paused for a moment before the dwelling of the unfortunate miser. Ignorant of the catastrophe that had occurred there during the night, he could not help thinking that the house had a drearier look than usual; but attributing the notion to his own gloomy thoughts, he attached little importance to it, and passed on.

On gaining Millbank, he speedily discovered the Chequers, and entering the house, recognised his old acquaintance, the former landlord of the Rose and Crown. The latter, however, did not recollect him, but eyed him rather suspiciously, till Randulph told him he came recommended by Mr. Cordwell Firebras.

"Hush!" exclaimed the host. "He's only known as Captain Vizard here. My right name is Tom Wiles, but I'm now called Dick Chinnock. I fancy I've seen you before, sir."

"I was introduced to the club when it met at your house in Gardiner's-street, Petty France," replied Randulph, "on the night when the members were pursued by the guard."

"And an unlucky night it was!" exclaimed Chinnock. "We've never prospered since. I remember you now. I hope you wont bring the same ill-luck again. How soon will the captain be here, sir?"

"Not before midnight, I believe," replied Randulph, "and as I'm a good deal fatigued, I should like to go to bed for a few hours. I wish to be as private as possible."

"I'll get a bed ready for you directly, sir," replied the host; "and in the meantime, perhaps you'll step this way."

And passing through a back door, he crossed a little garden, at the lower end of which stood a little square summer-house, with a pointed, tiled roof, surmounted by a vane. It overlooked the river, and on this side there was a platform, protected by a railing, with steps descending to the water's edge. On the left stood an old mill—a tall, picturesque, wooden structure. Between the summer-house and the mill flowed a small brook, which turned a large water-wheel, connected with the latter building. At the back of the mill, over a dense mass of habitations, could be distinguished the towers of Westminster Abbey.

Having shown Randulph into the summer-house, the landlord promised to let him know as soon as his bed was ready, and left him. The little chamber was furnished with a small deal table, painted green, and a couple of chairs. Its internal decorations were much injured by damp and neglect. The gay paintings on the walls and ceilings were nearly effaced; the gilding had turned black; and the looking-glasses were so dim that they scarcely reflected an object. As Randulph, after taking a momentary survey of the room, was about to seat himself, he noticed a ring in the floor, concealed by a bit of carpet, which he removed, and perceived that it covered a trap-door. Impelled by curiosity, he lifted the latter by means of the ring, and discovered a lower chamber, accessible by a ladder, placed against the stout pile supporting the floor. There appeared to be nothing in it; and satisfied with the discovery he had made, Randulph closed the trap-door, and restored the carpet to its original position.

Drawing his chair to a little window on the left, he threw it open, and amused himself by examining the old mill. A small vessel was moored in front of it, apparently filled with sacks of corn and straw, which some of the crew were unloading.

While watching these proceedings, Randulph could not help suspecting (though he scarcely knew why,) that some underhand business was going forward. The sacks were teagled to the upper story of the mill, and one of them chancing to fall, proved by its sound that its contents were not what they seemed. The trusses of straw, too, seemed oddly shaped, and Randulph persuaded himself that muskets and other arms were concealed within them.

If he had not felt quite certain that these proceedings had some connexion with the Jacobite cause, a circumstance that occurred almost immediately afterwards would have satisfied him of the fact. One of the crew in the little vessel observing him at the window of the summer-house, made various signs to him, which, though he could not precisely interpret, he understood to bear relation to the articles they were landing, as well as to their object.

Soon after this, Mr. Chinnock presented himself, and apologising for his delay, said—

"The only bed-room I have is engaged by an invalid, but I've made you up a nice bed on a sofa, in a snug little closet, where no one will disturb you."

Following the host into the house, Randulph was shown into a closet opening into a larger room, where, as had been stated, a sofa-bed was prepared. He threw himself upon it, without undressing, and presently fell asleep. How long he remained in this state he knew not, but he was awakened by the sound of muttered voices in the next apartment, and became an involuntary listener to their discourse.

"They will all be here at midnight," said a voice, "and you may capture them without difficulty."

"If we do, sir," replied another, "your reward is certain, though you are a Jesuit priest. I shall bring a strong party of men with me."

"And I'll take care to admit them," said a third, whose voice Randulph recognised as that of the landlord, "provided you promise me a third of the reward, and undertake that I shall not be implicated in the matter."

"I give you my word, as an officer in his majesty's grenadier guards, that it shall be so," rejoined the previous speaker, "and that is better than the written engagement of any Jacobite."

"The reward is three hundred pounds," said a sharp conceited voice. "That's one hundred to Mr. Chinnock, another hundred to Father Verselyn, and a third to me. Is that distinctly understood?"

"Distinctly, Mr. Cripps," replied the officer, "provided I take them."

"Yes, of course," said the landlord; "but you can't fail to do so, if you follow my instructions. I'll put them into your hands."

"Can't you come down with something beforehand, captain?" asked Mr. Cripps.

"Not with a crown," replied the officer. "I have already pledged my word that you shall receive the reward, and that must content you. It is as much as traitors can expect," he added, with a contemptuous laugh.

"You'll take care I am not injured?" said the Jesuit.

"I'll do my best," replied the officer; "but you must look to yourself. And now to arrange our plans. As soon as it gets dark, I'll place half-a-dozen of my grenadiers, under the care of Tom Pratt (Long Tom, as the men call him), in the summer-house, near the river. They'll cut off their retreat, if any should be attempted, by that way."

"Long Tom and his men must hide themselves in the lower room of the summer-house, till Captain Vizard—I mean Cordwell Firebras—has made his search," said Chinnock. "He's sure to be here the first, and if he's seized too soon, you may lose the others."

"I must have the whole pack, or you don't get the reward," said the officer.

"There's a young man asleep in that closet, sent by the captain," said the landlord—"I'm not quite sure that he's a Jacobite. What shall we do with him?"

"Detain him," replied the officer. "I hold you responsible for his safe custody."

"But he's a stout, resolute fellow," said Chinnock, "and may get off, in spite of me."

"I'll leave you a couple of my grenadiers," replied the officer;—"they'll remain in the bar, like chance customers. Call them, if you require assistance."

After a little further conversation, which Randolph could not catch, they separated, and he began to reflect upon the new posture of affairs. He was now involved in a fresh difficulty, from which he did not see how he could escape. Though anxious to warn Cordwell Firebras and the other Jacobites of their danger, he felt it would be almost impracticable. Any attempt at flight from the house must be attended with great risk, after the precaution taken by the others to prevent it, and he finally resolved to let things take their course, and to be guided in his plan of action by circumstances.

Determined, however, to ascertain whether his movements were watched, he walked forth, and proceeded towards the summer-house. The host was instantly at his side, and he caught a glimpse of Mr. Cripps in the doorway, and behind him the two grenadiers. Taking no sort of notice of these hostile preparations, he talked indifferently to the landlord, and presently returned with him to the house, and ordered some refreshment.

Evening, at length, arrived, and as it grew dusk, Randulph gazed into the garden, and perceived the figures of the grenadiers, headed by Long Tom, steal off towards the summer-house. He also fancied he saw others station themselves at the side of the brook running between the inn garden and the mill yard, and he had no doubt the street door was guarded in a similar manner. The trap was thus completely set, and he trembled to think what might be the fate of those for whom, however he differed with them in political opinions, he still entertained a strong friendship.

Slowly as the hours had hitherto passed, the interval between this time and that appointed for the arrival of Cordwell Firebras appeared yet more tedious. Twelve o'clock came—half-past—and yet none of the club had arrived; and Randulph began to hope that they had received some intimation of the plot against them. The same idea apparently occurred to the landlord, for he became very fidgety, and kept coming constantly into Randulph's room, asking whether he knew what could be the cause of Captain Vizard's being so late.

"I'm afraid something must have happened to him and the other gentlemen," he said; "the Captain is punctuality itself—and so indeed are they all. I wonder what can have occurred."

"Perhaps they may have been betrayed," said Randulph.

"I hope not!" cried the landlord; "if so, I should lose—my best friends," he added, correcting himself hastily.

"Do you expect Sir Norfolk Salusbury to-night?" asked Randulph.

"I did, sir," replied the landlord; "but I don't know what to think now."

"And Sir Bulkeley Price and Father Verselyn?"

"Both, sir," was the reply.

"Any others?" inquired Randulph.

"Several, I believe," returned the landlord. "A very full meeting of the club was expected. What *can* have kept them away? Ah! as I live, that's the Captain's voice. All's right now."

So saying, he rushed out, and presently afterwards returned, ushering in Cordwell Firebras. The latter looked greatly exhausted.

"Give me a cup of wine, landlord," he said; "I feel faint, I've had some hard work to do."

The host instantly flew to a cupboard, and produced a flask and a large glass. Filling the latter, he presented it to Firebras, who emptied it at a draught.

"You are late to-night, Captain," said the landlord; "I had almost given you up. Will the rest of the gentlemen be here?"

"I expect so," replied Firebras. "I thought they would have been here before me. Have you looked into the garden and the summer-house?"

"I have," replied the landlord.

"I'll go there myself," said the other, taking a brace of pistols from his pocket. "Stay where you are," he added to Randulph, who was about to follow him.

Accompanied by the host, who carried a lantern, Firebras crossed the garden; but though he glanced around, he perceived nothing, and marched direct to the summer-house.

On approaching it, Chinnock ran forward, and pretending to try the door, drew out the key, crying, so as to be heard by those inside—"Dear me! it's locked—wait a minute, sir, and I'll fetch the key."

Without pausing for a reply, he darted off to the house. In a couple of minutes he returned, apologising to Firebras—whom he found impatiently pacing the platform in front of the summer-house, and gazing at the darkling tide flowing past him—for his delay; and unlocked the door.

The summer-house was empty; the grenadiers had taken the hint, and descended to the lower chamber. A glance satisfied Firebras that all was right, and he returned slowly to the house, the landlord stamping upon the floor as he quitted the building, as a signal to the grenadiers that they might now come forth from their concealment.

On reaching the house, Firebras dismissed the landlord, and going up to Randulph, clapped him on the shoulder, and said—"I have rare news for you."

"And I have news for you," replied the other.

"Hear mine first!" cried Firebras. "What if I tell you I am come to offer you your estates and the hand of Hilda, if you join the Jacobite party?"

"There would be no use in joining you now!" returned Randulph.

"You think I'm trifling with you!" cried Firebras, producing a packet; "but this will speak to the contrary. Here is the assignment of your estates to Isaac Isaacs. A receipt in full of all claims is attached to it. The deed is yours, provided you join us."

"You amaze me!" cried Randulph, gazing at the packet; "that is unquestionably the deed I executed."

"Most certainly it is," replied Firebras. "It is too long a story to tell you how I became possessed of it," he added, re-placing it in his pocket," but I have other intelligence for you, Mr. Scarve is dead ! "

Randulph uttered an exclamation of surprise.

" He died last night," pursued Firebras," and left his property to Philip Frewin, in case of Hilda's refusal to marry him."

" But Philip may not live to claim the fulfilment of the condition," cried Randulph.

" Philip, also, is dead," replied Firebras. And smiling at Randulph's astonishment, he added, " Now you see that all is in your grasp. Fate has given you the lady of your love. I offer you your fortune. Can you refuse to join us ?"

" Mr. Firebras," said Randulph, composing himself, " this is not the time to put such a question to me."

" Pardon me," cried Firebras, sternly, " I must have an answer now—at this moment—or you lose your estates and Hilda for ever. Do not suppose I threaten lightly. I can, and will, make good my words."

" You mistake me altogether," rejoined Randulph. " I mean to say, it would be useless for me to assent. You are betrayed."

" Betrayed ?" exclaimed Firebras, in a voice of thunder. " How! by whom ? But this is a mere assertion made to turn me from my purpose."

" You will find it too true," replied Randulph. " The house is environed on all sides by grenadiers."

" I have just visited the summer-house," said Firebras. " There was no one there."

" The men were concealed in the lower chamber," said Randulph.

" It may be so," cried Firebras, with terrible imprecation. " But they shall not take me easily. My pistols ! ha ! they have been removed ! The landlord, then, is our betrayer."

" He is," replied Randulph. " Your only chance of escape is apparent unconsciousness of the design. You might, perhaps, make good your own retreat—but the others——"

" I will never desert them," said Firebras. " There is a boat at hand, for I ordered Jacob Post to be in waiting for you off the summer-house for another purpose, and I caught a glimpse of him just now. Ha ! here come our friends." And as he spoke, Sir Norfolk Salusbury, Sir Bulkeley Price, Father Verselyn, Mr. Travers, and four or five other gentlemen, entered the room.

" Leave us, landlord," said Firebras ; " we will call you when we want you."

And the order being obeyed, he bolted the door.

" We are betrayed, gentlemen," said Firebras, in a low tone ; " the house is surrounded by guards, and our retreat is cut off by the river."

As the words were uttered, the door was tried by some persons without, who, finding it fastened, proceeded to burst it open.

"To the garden! to the garden!" cried Firebras.

And the party made for the window. Before, however, the whole of them could pass through it, the officer, and a party of grenadiers burst open the door, and endeavoured to seize them. Firebras, and the others, with the exception of Randulph, drew their swords, and the next instant, an encounter took place. But, as all was buried in darkness, little mischief was done.

In spite of the efforts of the soldiers to prevent them, five or six of the Jacobites contrived to get across the ditch, and gaining the mill, took shelter within it. They were followed by a party of grenadiers, who fired a few shots at them. Whether the circumstance was the result of accident or design is immaterial, but a few minutes afterwards the mill was found to be on fire. Flames burst from the upper windows, throwing a fierce glare on the groups below, and brightly illumining the towers of Westminster Abbey.

Repeated loud explosions were next heard, threatening each moment to shake the mill to pieces; while some of the unfortunate Jacobites were seen springing from a side window upon the water-wheel, and trying to descend by it. Two others, at the risk of breaking their necks, dropped from a window facing the river, and endeavoured to gain the vessel moored beside it. The fugitives on the water-wheel were held in check by a party of grenadiers, who, having thrown a couple of planks over the little stream, were enabled to reach them.

Meanwhile, favoured by the previous darkness, for all was now bright as day, Firebras, Salusbury, and the rest of the Jacobites, made good their retreat as far as the summer-house. Some of them even managed to force their way to the platform. Here a desperate struggle took place, in which Sir Norfolk was severely wounded in the side by a bayonet.

By this time the fire had broken out in the mill, and its glare showed Jacob at a little distance in a skiff. Notwithstanding the menaces of the soldiers, who pointed their guns at him, and threatened to fire if he approached nearer, Jacob pushed resolutely towards the summer-house. He was now close under the platform, and made signs to Randulph to descend, but the latter would not desert Sir Norfolk, who had been seized by a couple of grenadiers. He threw himself upon the old baronet's captors, and in the struggle that ensued, the railing gave way, precipitating Sir Bulkeley Price, the Jesuist, and the grenadiers into the tide. Before the other soldiers had recovered from their surprise at this occurrence, Randulph had lowered Sir Norfolk into the skiff, and sprung in after him.

Jacob's efforts to push off were impeded by Sir Bulkeley Price, who clung to the stern of the skiff, earnestly imploring them to take him in. Father Verselyn caught hold of the steps, and apprehensive of some further disaster, crept along the side of the summer-house, and took refuge in a small sewer, in the slime of which it is supposed he perished, for he was never heard of more.

Meanwhile, Cordwell Firebras—engaged hand to hand with the officer, who, having vainly summoned him to surrender, attacked him in person—had reached the platform. Seeing escape impossible, Firebras, while defending himself against the officer, called to Randulph, whom he descried below, and held but the packet to him. The latter ordered Jacob to keep the skiff steady, and to bring it as near the combatants as possible.

While Jacob obeyed the injunction, a successful thrust from Firebras stretched his adversary upon the platform, but the next moment he received his own death-wound from Long Tom, who stepped forward, as his officer fell, and discharged his musket into his breast.

With a dying effort Firebras stretched his hand over the rail, and, consigning the packet to Randulph, fell backwards into the water.

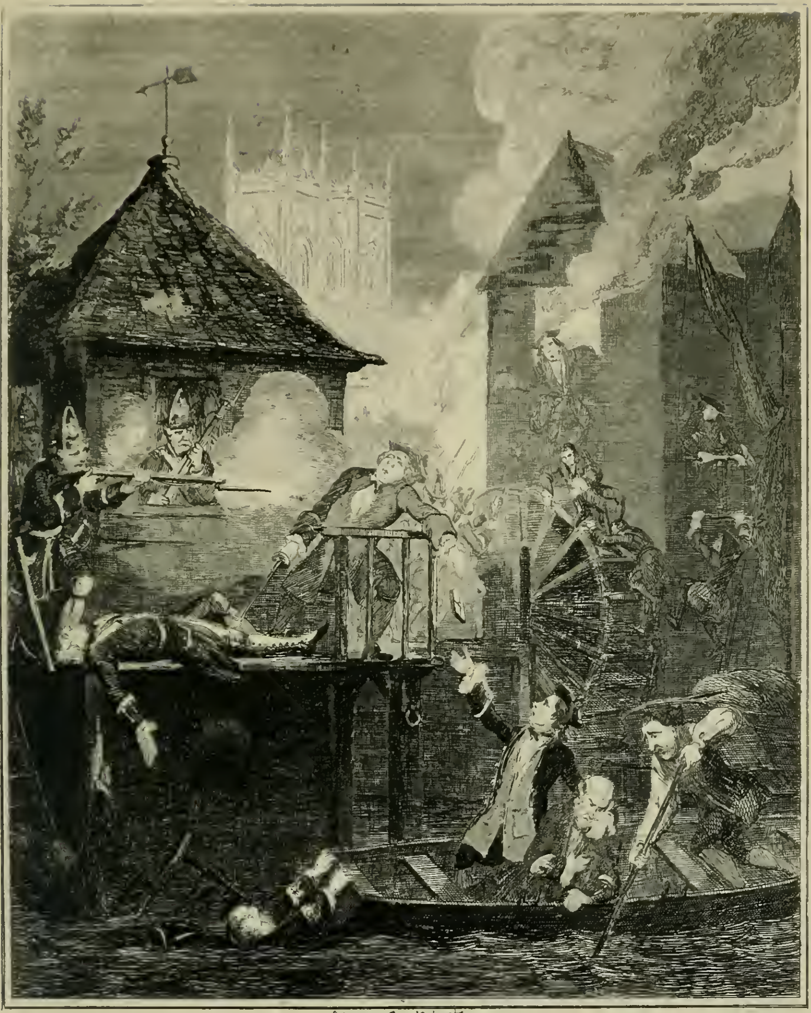
Possessed of the packet, Randulph turned to the aid of Sir Bulkeley Price, and pulling him into the skiff, Jacob instantly pushed off. Assisted by the stream, which ran very strong, they soon got under the sides of the vessel near the mill, and were sheltered from the fire of the soldiery.

Meanwhile, the conflagration raged fast and furiously, and before the skiff containing the fugitives had got half way to Westminster Bridge, a tremendous explosion took place, scattering the blazing fragments of the old mill far and wide into the river.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH THE WEDDING-DAY IS FIXED.

About three months after the events detailed in the preceding chapter, a family party were assembled in the dining-room of the house at Lambeth, consisting of Abel, Trussell, Mrs. Crew, and Hilda. The latter was dressed in deep mourning, and had a shade of melancholy on her countenance, which rather added to her beauty than detracted from it. She sat near Abel Beechcroft, who regarded her with parental affection, and whose features, having lost their somewhat cynical and saturnine cast, now expressed only benevolence and kindliness. Always placid and composed, Mrs. Crew looked more cheerful than before; and Trussell, who, indeed, was rarely out of humour, appeared in tip-top spirits. In short, a happier party never met together. Nor did their attendant, Mr. Jukes, appear a whit less contented.



George Cruikshank

Dispersion of the Jacobite Club, and Death of Cordwell Firebrace.

"Well, my dear niece," said Trussell,—"for so I shall make bold to call you, in anticipation of our intended relationship,—we shall certainly have Randulph back to-day."

"This morning, do you think?" she rejoined.

"Why, no, possibly not till evening," said Trussell. "Ah, sir!" he added, to Abel, "how different our nephew's present journey from Cheshire is from the last. Then he came with very little money in his pocket, and very little prospect of getting any—deprived of his inheritance, and with no apparent prospect of its restitution. Now he arrives a wealthy man, with a prospect of such happiness before him as a king might envy!"

"It's a story to write in a book," said Mr. Jukes, rubbing his eyes.

"I fear the two months during which Randulph has been absent must have passed very slowly over your head, Hilda?" observed Abel. "I may ask you the question now that we shall so soon have him with us again."

"To say that I have not felt his absence, and wished for his return, would not be to speak the truth, sir," she replied; "but it would be equally untrue to say that I have not been happier during the period you mention than I ever was in my life. How, indeed, could it be otherwise, when I have experienced so much attention from you, from your brother, and from Mrs. Crew?"

"I'm sure there is nothing we wouldn't do to make you happy," said Mrs. Crew.

"Nothing!" cried Mr. Jukes, emphatically—"nothing *we* wouldn't do."

"I beg pardon, Mr. Jukes," said Hilda; "I ought to have included you in the list of my kind friends."

"You make me proud to hear you say so," replied Mr. Jukes. "I told my master, long before things came to this, that nothing would make me so happy as to see you in this house, married to Mr. Randulph. And I told him also that we would have one of the upper rooms turned into a nursery, and that he should sit in an easy chair, nursing a little Randulph, or a little Abel, as the case may be, with a Miss Hilda, or a Miss Sophia, playing beside him. Didn't I tell you that, sir?"

"You did—you did," replied Abel, hastily.

"Get me some usquebaugh, Mr. Jukes," said Trussell, who almost choked himself with laughing at the butler's speech, while Hilda was covered with blushes, and Mrs. Crew looked a little confused.

The order was promptly obeyed, and Trussell, as he raised the glass to his lips, said, "May I live to see the realization of Mr. Jukes's wish!"

"I must drink that toast myself," said the butler, retiring to the sideboard.

"By-the-bye, Hilda," said Trussell, laughing, "I haven't told you what has become of your disconsolate suitor, Beau Villiers, who wouldn't be content till you had refused him half a dozen times? Disappointed in his hope of obtaining you, or rather your fortune, he laid siege to Lady Spinke, and has eloped with her to Paris!"

"A proper consummation to his folly," observed Abel.

"But the best is to come," pursued Trussell. "Sir Singleton's marriage, as you know, took place at the Fleet, and not having the fear of courts of law before his eyes, nor thinking it necessary to get a divorce, the old beau is actually going to marry again. And this time his choice has fallen upon—whom do you think?—Lady Brabazon!"

"I'm glad that odious woman's got rid of, in any way," said Mrs. Crew. "I never could endure her."

"By-the-bye, Mr. Jukes," said Trussell, laughing to himself at his sister's vivacity, "I never heard what became of your nephew, Mr. Cripps?"

"I'm happy to say he's a reformed character, sir," replied the butler. "He was mixed up in some way or other, I don't know how, with that Jacobite disturbance, where Mr. Cordwell Firebras met his death, and received a very awkward wound, which put him in danger of his life. Since then he has become quite an altered person, and neither drinks, games, nor dresses, as he used to do. He's at present living with a very quiet family in Abingdon-street; and, as far as I can learn, is doing his duty."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Abel; "and since that is the case, I'll take care you sha'n't lose the twenty guineas you were foolish enough to lend him."

Mr. Jukes made a suitable acknowledgment.

The breakfast things were taken away, but the party were still chatting over the table, when the door suddenly opened, and Randulph rushed into the room. He was in his travelling attire, and though somewhat embrowned, looked handsomer, Hilda thought, than she had ever seen him—except on the occasion of his first visit to her father's house. He was followed by Jacob Post, who had attended him in his journey, and who shook hands heartily with Mr. Jukes.

Hilda, who had risen at Randulph's approach, was instantly locked in his embrace. The tears started to Abel's eyes as he regarded the meeting of the young couple; Mrs. Crew gazed at them with fond delight; but Trussell, who was not quite so much interested in lovers' meetings, availed himself of the opportunity of taking a pinch of snuff.

"Well, you're looking vastly well, Randulph, I must say," observed Trussell, after his nephew's affectionate greetings had gone all round. "I don't think the country has disagreed with you.'

"It is the quiet life he has led there, brother, and the early hours he has kept, that have agreed with him," observed Abel.

"You are right, uncle," replied Randulph, "and I am now quite convinced, from the experiment I have just made, that a quiet life is more to my taste than a gay one."

"I am glad to hear you say so!" cried Abel.

Trussell made no remark, but he slightly shrugged his shoulders, and took an inordinate pinch of snuff.

"You don't believe me, I see, uncle," said Randulph, laughing. "But I assure you it is the case. And I have no doubt I shall bring you to my opinion, when I get you down to Cheshire."

"When you *do* get me there, I've no doubt you will," replied Trussell, somewhat drily. "Town agrees with me perfectly. Every one to his taste."

"And your tenants were glad to see you, Randulph, I am sure," said his mother, taking his hand.

"They were, indeed," replied Randulph; "and I never experienced greater gratification than when they were collected in the old hall, and I told them I was once more their landlord. Their shouts made the rafters ring again. They all wished to see their mistress that is to be," he continued, gazing tenderly at Hilda.

"And I see not why their satisfaction should be delayed," replied Abel. "The considerations of decorum that apply to others do not apply to Hilda. So much of her life has been passed in self-sacrifice and trouble, that the sooner she is recompensed for it the better."

"The best thing we can do is to leave the young couple alone together to fix the day," said Trussell. "Make it as early as you can, Randulph; and notwithstanding the objections I raised to the country just now, I shall be happy to spend a month or two with you at Crew Hall, whenever you choose to invite me."

"The house will always be your home, my dear uncle," said Randulph. "No one will be more welcome."

Acting upon Trussell's hint, the others then withdrew. Though Randulph had a thousand things to say to Hilda, he could recollect none of them: but perhaps the expressions of rapturous devotion he was able to utter were fully as agreeable to his listener's ear as any other kind of discourse he might have adopted.

Thus more than half an hour passed away so swiftly, so delightfully, that the lovers did not know they had been alone many minutes, when they were interrupted by a discreet tap at the door.

"Come in," said Randulph.

"Beg pardon," said Mr. Jukes, cautiously obeying the summons, "but Miss Thomasine Deacle is without, and wishes to speak to Miss Scarve."

"With me!" exclaimed Hilda, in surprise.

"I told her you were engaged with Mr. Randulph—particularly engaged," replied the butler; "but she said she didn't mind that. She wants to see you on a matter material to her happiness."

"She is a strange creature," said Hilda, smiling at the recollection of her former interview with her. "I dare say she wants to tell me something about Peter Pokerich."

"Very likely," said the butler, "for he is with her.'

"Well, let them come in," replied Hilda.

And the next moment, the fair Thomasine and the little barber were ushered into the room.

"I trust you will excuse this intrusion, Miss Scarve," said the fair Thomasine, who was a little disposed to be in heroics; "but I have a favour to beg of you. You are aware of the admiration I have always entertained for you—of the devotion I have felt towards you——"

"I am quite sensible of both," interrupted Hilda, smiling; "but the favour?"

"After all, my heart fails me—I cannot ask it," said the fair Thomasine, turning away in confusion.

"I'll tell you what it is," interposed Peter: "she declares she'll never have me, unless we're married on the same day as you and Mr. Randulph."

"On the same day, and at the same church," said the fair Thomasine, exhibiting a face like a blush rose. "The favour I wished to ask you, was your consent to this arrangement. Peter met Mr. Randulph and Jacob crossing Westminster Bridge, on their return from Cheshire this morning, and we thought we had better lose no time in making the request."

"My consent was scarcely required," said Hilda; "but as soon as the day is fixed, you shall know it."

"I hope it will be soon!" cried Peter; "I'm tired of being put off so often."

"It would ill become me to exhibit any impatience," said the fair Thomasine, casting down her eyes.

"I sympathize with their situation, Hilda," said Randulph, taking her hand. "Can we not give them an answer now. To-day is Thursday. Let it be Monday next."

"Oh yes, Monday, by all means?" cried Peter, jumping into the air, and clapping his hands.

"I dare not urge Miss Scarve to greater expedition," said the fair Thomasine, still looking down; "but——"

"Your answer!" cried Peter, throwing himself on his knees before Hilda.

"Yes, your answer!" cried the fair Thomasine, kneeling down beside Peter.

"You cannot resist these entreaties, Hilda," said Randulph, smiling.

"I cannot, indeed," she replied. "Be it as you propose."

"Our marriage will take place on Monday," said Randulph: "and we shall be united at the parish church at Lambeth."

"How charming!" cried Peter, rising, and assisting the fair Thomasine to her feet. "We can go there in a boat. Wont that be delightful?"

"I shall never forget this obligation, Miss Scarve," said the fair Thomasine, taking Hilda's hand, and pressing it to her lips; "and may the day you have fixed be productive of happiness to both of us. We deserve to be rewarded for the troubles we have experienced."

And dropping a low curtesy to Randulph, she took her departure with Peter, who skipped out of the room, scarcely able to contain himself for joy.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DETAILING AN EVENT WHICH MAY POSSIBLY HAVE BEEN ANTICIPATED FROM THE PRECEDING CHAPTER.

We shall hurry over the intervening period as rapidly as the lovers themselves would have hurried it over, and proceed at once to the wished-for day.

A little before nine o'clock, on this eventful morning, Randulph, who had taken up his quarters with Sir Bulkeley Price, in Saint James's-square, entered the breakfast-room, arrayed in his bridal attire, which had been prepared for him by the skilful hands of Desmartins. He found Sir Bulkeley Price and Sir Norfolk Salusbury at the table—the latter having come up from Wales, whither he had retired to recruit himself after his wound, expressly to attend the ceremony. After receiving their congratulations, Randulph sat down with them, but as he could only swallow a cup of chocolate, he underwent much rallying on his want of appetite.

Breakfast over, the party drove to Whitehall Stairs, where a six-oared barge was in readiness to convey them across the river. Jacob Post was appointed coxswain of this barge, and he wore a waterman's coat of scarlet cloth, and velvet jockey-shaped cap of the same colour. The six rowers were attired in the same livery, and presented a very gay appearance.

The morning was bright and beautiful, and everything seemed to Randulph to participate in his happiness. Each boat that passed them, seeing the purpose on which they were bent, cheered them cordially, and Jacob, who was greatly elated, returned their greetings lustily.

As they passed through Westminster Bridge, and shaped their rapid course to Lambeth, they passed a boat containing a couple in bridal attire, and rowed by watermen with favours in their caps. These were Mr. Rathbone and Mrs. Nettleship, who, having made a composition with their creditors, had come to the conclusion that the best thing they could do would be to fulfil their original agreement, and having heard that Randulph and Hilda were to be united at Lambeth, they determined, like Peter Pokerich and the fair Thomasine, to be married at the same time, and at the same church. The boats cheered each other as they passed.

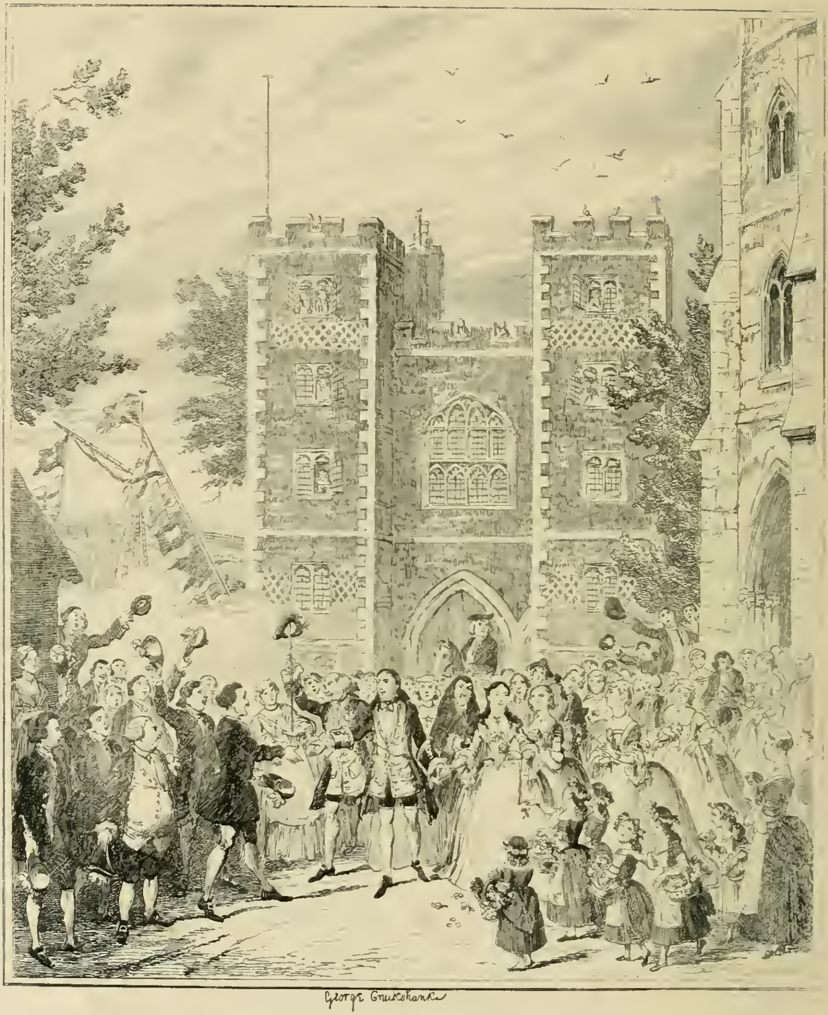
Shortly after this, they came up with a four-oared cutter, in which was a still more gaily dressed bridal party, consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Deacle, the fair Thomasine, and Peter Pokerich. The sunny tresses, bright eyes, and dimpling cheeks of the bride attracted Sir Bulkeley's admiration, and he called out to Peter that he ought to consider himself a very happy man; to which the little barber replied, "that he was the happiest man in the world—Mr. Crew excepted."

Another cheering passed between the rowers; and Randulph's barge swept over the sparkling waters to the stairs near Lambeth Palace, where he and his companions disembarked.

As Abel Beechcroft was extremely well known and highly respected in the neighbourhood, great preparations were made to lend éclat to his nephew's wedding. A band of music was stationed on a lighter moored near the stairs; and the lighter itself was hung all over with flags and streamers. The band was playing, the bells ringing, and as Randulph leaped ashore, a loud shout from the crowd collected to see him land, welcomed him, while many flattering comments, in no very low key, were made upon his handsome appearance by the female part of the assemblage. In passing towards his uncle's residence, Randulph noticed with interest a troop of pretty little girls with wreaths round their heads, and baskets of flowers in their hands, standing in the path leading to the church.

The party were admitted by Mr. Jukes, whose portly figure was well displayed in an expansive snowy waistcoat, a brown coat, spick and span new for the occasion, and a well-powdered bob-wig. The worthy butler gave Randulph a hearty welcome, and wished him many years of happiness, and having ushered him and the others into the parlour, returned to the hall to Jacob, to give him wedding favours for himself and the watermen, which the other hastened to distribute.

The meeting between the young bride and bridegroom was full of agitated delight. Abel looked perfectly happy, but thoughtful, as did Mrs. Crew, whose emotion found relief in an occasional sigh—not the sigh of misgiving, but the relief of a joy-oppressed heart. Trussell was, as usual, in very high spirits. He shook Randulph heartily by the hand, wished him all sorts


George Cruikshank

The Marriage of Randolph and Hilda.

of happiness, and then cordially greeted the Welsh baronets. Besides Mrs. Clinton, there was another young lady present, the daughter of an old friend of Mrs. Crew's, a Miss Wilbraham, who acted as bridesmaid to Hilda.

Soon afterwards, all being declared in readiness, the bride prepared to set forth, under the care of Abel Beechcroft, who, before they quitted the house, in an earnest tone invoked a blessing on her head and on that of his nephew. And both felt that the blessing of so good a man would not be thrown away!

Cheered by the good wishes and smiling countenances of the groups through which they passed, and enlivened by the sunshine, the party entered the church. Peter Pokerich and the fair Thomasine, with Mr. Rathbone and Mrs. Nettleship, were already standing beside the altar. The young couple advanced, and took the central place, and the church was instantly crowded with spectators.

The service was admirably performed by a venerable clergyman—an old and valued friend of Abel's,—and at its close, the concourse issued from the church, dividing into two lines, so as to allow a passage for the wedding train. As soon as the happy couple were seen issuing hand-in-hand from the Gothic portal of the old church, a loud and joyous shout was raised by the assemblage, a couple of guns were fired on board the lighter, and the church bells rang forth a joyous peal.

It was a heart-cheering sight, and many a breast throbbed,—and many an eye grew moist at beholding it. And plenty of spectators there were. The whole of the area before the church was filled, and the windows and towers of the old archiepiscopal palace were studded with faces. The little flower-girls now stepped forward, and strewed their fragrant offerings in the path of the happy pair, who walked on amid the continued cheers of the bystanders.

A little behind Randulph, on the right, walked Trussell, who, excited by the general enthusiasm, had placed his hat on his cane, and waved it to the crowd. Near him came Abel and Miss Wilbraham, the former with a glowing smile on his countenance, such as Mr. Jukes himself never remembered to have witnessed. After them walked Sir Norfolk Salusbury and Mrs. Crew.

Next in order came Mr. and Mrs. Pokerich, the latter of whom thought it decorous to turn aside her pretty face from the ardent gaze of her enamoured little lord. Lastly came Mr. and Mrs. Rathbone, whose appearance did not seem greatly to interest the spectators. Sir Bulkeley Price had posted himself on the left of the church-door, to watch the wedding train pass by, and to wait the coming forth of the clergyman.

As Randulph advanced through the crowd, Jacob Post stepped forward, and holding out his rough, honest hand to him, said in a voice, the sincerity of which could not be doubted,—

"God bless you, sir, and your lovely bride, and may you know years of uninterrupted happiness!"

"And take my blessing, too," said Mr. Jukes, likewise extending his hand. "An old man's good wishes, though he be but a dependent, can do no harm."

"I thank you both!" cried Randulph, in a voice of emotion; "and my wife thanks you too."

"I do—I do," she replied; "nor do I doubt the fulfilment of your wishes."

And as she uttered these words, loud and deafening cheers rent the air, and another discharge of guns took place.

In this way they proceeded to the house, where they were followed by the rest of the party, and presently afterwards by the clergyman and Sir Bulkeley. They then all sat down to an excellent repast.

By desire of his hospitable master, Mr. Jukes invited the other couples and their friends to take refreshments at his house, which, as they delightedly availed themselves of the offer, were served to them in the summer-house overlooking the river; where, while enjoying themselves, they did not forget to drink long life and happiness to Randulph and his bride.

The honeymoon—all the rest of their life was a honeymoon—was passed by the happy couple, in good old-fashioned style, at Lambeth. They then proceeded to Cheshire, accompanied by Trussell and Mrs. Crew, and were soon afterwards followed by Abel, who passed the winter with them.

In due time, the prognostications of Mr. Jukes were fulfilled, and Abel displayed no objection to the endearments of two great-nieces and a great-nephew.

Appointed Randulph's head-gamekeeper, Jacob Post passed the remainder of his days in the service of his new master.

Of the two brothers Beechcroft, Abel was the first to pay the debt of nature, Trussell survived him two or three years, during which he was a great martyr to gout. He never, however, lost his temper, except when young Master Randulph accidentally trod on his toe, and then he would swear a round oath, to frighten him, and try to hit at him with his stick, as testy old gentlemen are wont to do in plays.

Randulph and Hilda almost touched the verge of the present century; and from the anecdotes of one of their descendants, in the third generation, the materials of the present Tale have been collected.

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